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## **Conversion to Islam : a study of native British converts.**

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CONVERSION TO ISLAM  
A STUDY OF NATIVE BRITISH CONVERTS

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Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement of the regulations  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of London

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**To Hilal Petek**

## ABSTRACT

*"Conversion to Islam A Study of Native British Converts"* is an interview study based on interviews with 70 converts to Islam, 50 males and 20 females. Interviews were done throughout 1990-1991 in various parts of England. The sample consists of 66 English, 3 Irish, and 1 Welsh. 51 were Church of England, 12 were Catholics, 3 were Methodists, and 4 were Jews. 23 subjects are currently involved in *Sufism*. Two *Sufi* groups, the group of *Shaykh Nazim* and that of *Abd al-Qādir as-Sufi (al-Murābit)* were observed.

The basic questions asked in the thesis are: Why did those interviewed become Muslims? What were their backgrounds? What were the patterns of conversion to Islam? And how far are existing conversion theories applicable to the native British converts to Islam who were interviewed?

Chapter I describes the methodology. Chapter II is about Muslims in Britain. It looks at both life-long Muslims and converts as well as presenting their history. It also deals with the differences within the Muslim community regarding missionary strategy.

Chapter III focuses on childhood and adolescence experiences reviewing the psychological and sociological theories of conversion and attempts to find out how far these theories are applicable to the converts interviewed. Chapter IV examines the backgrounds of the converts regarding religion and socio-economic status. It then analyses the immediate antecedents of the conversion as well as conversion process focusing on conversion motifs. A conversion process model is also developed in this chapter. Chapter V looks at the postconversion period to find out the changes the converts went through regarding beliefs, practices, etc. It also examines converts' present relationship with their parents and wider society. Chapter VI reveals the findings on conversion through *Sufism* as far as the *Sufi* groups studied were concerned. It elucidates the characteristics of conversion through *Sufism* and examines the differences between *Sufi* and non-*Sufi* conversion among those interviewed. Comparisons between conversion through *Sufism* and new religious movements in the West are also made in this chapter. Chapter VII presents the conclusions of the research.



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## INTRODUCTION

Religious conversion is an immensely complex phenomenon. The term religious conversion comprises diverse experiences. It may be an experience of increased devotion within the same religious structure, a shift from no religious commitment to a devout religious life, or a change from one religion to another.

Conversion experiences may come about in different circumstances, in different ways, and with different outcomes. They may occur in the sincere, soul-searching, honest man/woman, who may, for example, find greater values in beliefs other than those s/he was exposed to in his/her childhood or in an individual who wishes to marry an adherent of a religion other than his/hers.

The major objective of this thesis is to record the conversion experiences of 70 native British converts to Islam and to provide, to a certain extent, the reasons underlying them. It endeavours to understand the psychological and sociological roots of conversion. What has provoked these people? What is the nature of this transformation? What are the processes that are powerful enough to precipitate it? Are there long-term predispositions? Describing these processes and predispositions is the main objective of this thesis.

Since the turn of the century social scientists and religionists have adopted different perspectives when explaining the nature of the conversion experience. Social scientists have proposed a range of social and psychological forces at work, while believers have emphasised the nature of divine-human encounter. Social scientists have also differed among themselves as to the causes of conversion (see Heinrich, 1977: 656). Their differences may be categorised under three themes, the *first* sees conversion as a fantasy solution to stress, in which the threatening situation is overcome either by making an alliance with supernatural forces or by changing one's frame of reference so that previously distressing material no longer seems important. Much of the psychological literature on religion adopts this perspective. The *second* focuses on previous conditioning rather than the circumstances which produce the immediate result (e.g., stress). Thus it looks for socialisation circumstances that should leave one ripe for plucking. It looks at parental orientations, sex-role education, and the impact of schooling. The *third* emphasises interactions that make a different understanding of one's experience possible. This kind of argument focuses upon circumstances that lead one to take a particular frame of reference seriously. Most typically, it involves analysis of patterns of interpersonal influence and what is

sometimes called the process of encapsulation, whereby inputs from others become so mutually consistent and reinforcing that one begins to see things through the others' eyes. While many social scientists have focused their attention on a single "causal explanation," others have seen conversion as involving all three processes in interaction, as in Lofland-Stark's (1965: 874) seven-step conversion process model. This thesis is also concerned with how the above mentioned themes emerged to explain the conversion phenomena. For this reason the whole lifespan of the converts interviewed, i.e. childhood, adolescence experiences, and conversion process, etc. were examined and some variables were statistically analysed where necessary.

This study is necessarily limited to a particular sample of converts which may not be representative of all conversions to Islam. Therefore caution should be exercised when generalising from the present findings. However, I hope that readers of the thesis will gain an insight into the experience of those converts to Islam who were interviewed.

**CHAPTER ONE**

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**



## **Methodological Approach**

The phenomenon of religious conversion lies at the crossroads of several disciplines. It is a widely studied topic among various fields of the social sciences. Rambo's (1982) bibliography of various fields attests to the popularity of this subject among psychologists, sociologists, historians as well as theologians. Psychological studies of religious conversion were numerous at the turn of the century, but interest in the phenomenon dwindled in the course of the following decades. This waning interest reflected a decline in frequency of religious conversion within Christian religion. In Rambo's bibliography only 25 psychological studies, the majority of them clinical, have been identified since 1970. During the same period over a hundred sociologically oriented studies have been made. More recently, with the rise of new religious groups and the resurgence of "born again" evangelical Christianity, the phenomenon has reclaimed the attention of psychologists. Rigorous empirical studies of the experience from a psychological perspective are, however, still scarce. The most recent psychological studies have been undertaken largely from within a socio-psychological framework. The inclusion of societal variables by an increasing number of analysts subsumes the study of the topic under a social psychology of conversions, religious or otherwise (Taylor, 1975: 35-37). At a methodological level, the development is from scientific large-scale questionnaire-based research to smaller-scale research.

The aim of this research was to determine the reported nature of conversion to Islam so far as native-born British people were concerned. Preliminary studies by this author indicated that to study the conversion of these people requires one to adopt an interdisciplinary approach of psychology, sociology, history, and theology. The current research examines the accounts converts give of the why and how of their conversion experiences, and what made their conversion possible.

## **Procedure for the Study**

Traditionally popular methods in the psychology of religion have been the administration of questionnaires and the study of documentary accounts, mostly autobiographical, of conversion experiences. These have been supplemented by interviews where possible, often as a means of checking on the questionnaire, and the results have been evaluated statistically or written up in the form of case histories (see Clark, 1958: 191). With the emergence of new religious groups there have been many studies of conversion from sociological, psychological, and anthropological perspectives. The participant-observer technique has been popular. Recent

investigators of religious change have used the interview technique and found it to be practical and effective. Despite limited reliability and validity perhaps interviews provide the best approach for exploring the process of conversion and commitment (Bellah, 1974: 487-489). In order to better understand the conversion process, it has been suggested that individual cases must be examined (Wilson, 1982: 118), because the interview gives us the opportunity to enter the conceptual world of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves (McCracken, 1988: 9).

The current investigation used interview, and occasionally participant-observer techniques in order to better understand each individual's conversion experience. The purpose of the research was, not so much to test a specific hypothesis, but to try to chart and interpret what conversion meant for the individual, and to search for patterns in the actions, feelings, and ideas that were reported. Though the source of information was primarily the interviews, available published and unpublished records and books, newspapers, magazines, and journals were also used.

The interview was semi-structured and called for the preparation of an open-ended questionnaire which provides flexibility of response for the interviewee and is more sensitive to nuances of meaning of the words used by the converts. The questionnaire also ensured that the interview covered all the topics in the same order for each respondent, while still preserving a conversational context for each interview. For each question the interviewee had the opportunity to use explanatory, unstructured responses. Once the interview questionnaire (see appendix C) was prepared a pilot study of 12 converts was carried out and the results indicated that it would be an effective tool for investigating conversion experience. 70 converts to Islam were then selected for interview.

To aid in the construction of the interview questionnaire the literature on religious experience and conversion in the domain of psychology and sociology was reviewed (e.g. Starbuck, 1911, Sanctis, 1927, Pratt, 1948, Salzman, 1953, Taylor, 1975, Heinrich, 1977, Dollah, 1977, Krailsheimer, 1980, Downton, 1980, Ullman, 1989, Poston, 1988, Gillespie, 1991). The growing literature about the new religious movements was also examined (e.g. Bellah, 1976, Lofland, 1977a, Greil, 1977, Barker, 1984 and 1989, Wallis, 1984, Greil and Rudy, 1984, Robbins, 1988). In the end, a questionnaire that covered lifespan of the interviewees was prepared. In choosing the questions the results of previous studies were taken into account. For example, Ullman (1989: 11-16) found that converts characterised their childhood as unhappy reporting specific, disturbing, traumatic events. So, to test the replicability of this finding for the

present sample questions on childhood experiences like "Can you describe your relationship with your parents when a child?", or "Did anything unusual like separation from either parents happen to you?" were included

The questions in the first part of the questionnaire are on the childhood and adolescence experiences of the converts interviewed. Most of the questions here were selected from Ullman's (1989: 199-210) questionnaire on which Ullman's book *The Transformed Self: The Psychology of Religious Conversion* was based. This part of the questionnaire aimed to find out the relationships of the converts with their parents and to examine if they experienced a troubled adolescence. Questions were also included to determine if they came from religious or non-religious families, and how they would describe themselves when they were an adolescent to find out if it was during adolescence that they were alienated from the religion of their parents. These questions were included after reviewing the literature on identity and adolescence (e.g., Marcia, 1980, Levin and Zegans, 1974) and noting that in adolescence a lower proportion of the population than in other age-groups claim allegiance to the Christian churches in Britain (Francis, 1984: 10).

In the second part, questions regarding the preconversion period and conversion process were posed. The first three sections asked questions about the preconversion period after adolescence and then the two year period prior to conversion. In the first place, the questions attempted to determine if the subjects had been tempted to use drugs or alcohol in their youth. In the second place, interviewees were asked about their religious history and commitment. This was because a previous study (Poston, 1988) has suggested that converts to Islam come from the nominally religious section of the society, or had tried another religion before conversion. A review of the relevant literature (e.g., Heinrich, 1977, Harrison, 1974, Greil 1977, Ebaugh and Vaughn, 1984, Salzman, 1953, Christensen, 1963, Allison, 1969, Richardson, 1985) on conversion and new religious movements revealed a growing division between psychodynamic and cognitive approaches to the emotional and cognitive antecedents of conversion. To find out some of the emotional antecedents of conversion, questions like "Did anything unusual like a broken marriage occur?" were included. The elements (e.g., seekership) of Lofland and Stark's (1965) conversion process model were examined by questions like "Were you looking for something?" The last section included questions designed to look for conversion patterns based on Lofland and Skonovd's (1981) conversion motifs (intellectual, affectional, mystical, etc.). The interviewees were also asked to identify the most motivating factor in their conversion to see if this differed from subjects in a previous study of American and European converts to Islam by Poston (1988). Questions like "How were you introduced to Islam?" or "Was an individual or a group helping along the way?" were included to see if conversions came about

as a form of socialisation as claimed by some sociologically oriented researchers (e.g. Stark and Bainbridge, 1980a, Snow and Machalek, 1983, Long and Hadden, 1983)

In the third part of the questionnaire the consequences of conversion and the nature of transformation were investigated. The question of whether conversions were followed by postconversion depression or not was also addressed. Studies (e.g. Barker, 1989) on conversion to new religious movements also cover converts' families and ex-friends. So a question with regard to the interviewees' parents' and friends' reaction to their conversion was included in this section.

The final part of the questionnaire included questions on identity change since some researchers (e.g. Travisano, 1970, Snow and Machalek, 1983, Barker and Currie, 1985, Gillespie, 1991) defined religious conversion as a definite break with one's former identity involving a radical change in one's beliefs, personality, ideas, behaviour, and values. The subjects were allowed to define conversion for themselves and to describe how far they have changed, and also asked to look at their former life in retrospect. It has been suggested (Heinrich, 1977, Ullman, 1989: 15) that converts tend to denounce preconversion life as sinful and immoral and they tend to exaggerate their preconversion "sufferings" or "sins" so as to glorify their present salvation. To see if this is so for those involved in this study one of the questions asked "How do you see your former life? In the wrong direction, sinful, lost, etc." To examine if conversion meant also cultural change the question "Would you wish you had been born to a Muslim family/environment?" is included. This question attempted to see if they also accepted the culture of the community whose religion they converted to. Having asked a question about whether conversion meant total rejection of their former beliefs and attitudes, further questions on the extent of practising, (e.g. abstaining from alcohol or doing daily prayers), their new religion were posed. No comparison to life-long Muslims is made as there is only limited data available. In preparing some of the questions in this section Poston's (1988) questionnaire applied to American and European converts to Islam was helpful.

The interviews were conducted throughout 1990-91. The methods which were used to select the subjects were snowball and convenience sampling. At the outset finding converts to Islam seemed to present some difficulty since converts are scattered across Britain and they do not clump together in ghetto-like enclaves. Yet being already familiar with the Muslim community in Britain, and also being acquainted with several converts was an advantage. In the end, around 100 converts were met, but only 70 participated in this research which provided the basis for this thesis. Of those who were met but not interviewed, contact with 20 was lost although they had agreed to participate, and 10 for various reasons did not want to be interviewed. For example, one

said he did not want to participate in an academic study of conversion from a psychological point of view because "some psychology suggests that there is some personality defect or pathology on the part of the convert "

One of the problems encountered in interview studies is that the sex of the interviewer poses problems (Bulmer, 1983 214) It is found that women are more enthusiastic about talking to a woman researcher (Finch, 1984 72) Being a male interviewer was a disadvantage in interviewing female converts Some were too shy or uncomfortable to talk to a male whom they did not know, and tell him all about their past, and some were not allowed by their husbands to talk to a stranger

Converts were contacted through three channels *First*, help from various Islamic organisations was sought to provide the names and addresses of converts (n=12) *Second*, a substantial amount of time in mosques, and other Muslim meeting places was spent to identify British converts who would be obvious through their physical features (n=45) *Third*, converts already known or interviewed were asked to introduce the researcher to any other convert that they knew (n=13)

Several analyses were carried out to see if converts contacted by these different routes differed from each other in background factors or in features of conversion history Appendix E shows there were no significant differences between the groups with respect to any of the features examined, such as age of conversion, gender, education, class, and conversion motifs This suggests that the samples were not biased by comparison with each other

The prospective interviewees whose names' and addresses' were given were contacted either by a letter which introduced the research, or, (where a phone number was available) they were telephoned If they agreed to participate, it was indicated that the researcher was prepared to meet them whenever or wherever they would like To meet and interview converts the researcher travelled to London, Norwich, Oxford, Plymouth, Bournemouth, and Nottingham

23 (33%) subjects came to Islam through *Sufism* or they are currently involved in Sufi groups in Britain As a consequence a detailed study of two Sufi groups was made The first group was the group of *Shaykh Nazim* in London The second was that of *Abd al-Qādir as-Sufi (al-Muraḥit)* in Norwich The researcher has been involved in the activities of the group of *Shaykh Nazim* over a long period The group was fully aware the researcher status and the purpose of his presence is to try to understand what happened He was allowed to see and speak to anyone, and to freely observe whatever occurred However some current members of the group of *Abd*

*al-Qaḍir as-Sufi* were unwilling to give an interview and objected to this kind of study on the grounds that it would not do any good for Islam in Britain or in the West. For example, one person said "I will contribute to your study in a negative way by expressing my feelings against this study." Yet another said "I would participate in your study if you were studying western hostility against Islam." Nevertheless, one current member and five ex-members of the group were interviewed (see chapter VI)

### **Subjects**

The subjects were 50 males and 20 females. 66 subjects came from a Christian, and 4 from a Jewish background. Their ages ranged from 17 to 66 years, and they had been converted between 1 week and 48 years prior to participating in the study. 66 were English, 3 Irish, and 1 Welsh. All subjects lived in England.

The study demanded close personal contact with the subjects. As a consequence, some longlasting relationships with a number of converts developed (15 interviewees are still visited in their homes. And another 20 have been met on at least one occasion since the interview).

### **Statistical Power and Sample Size**

Some of the data were analysed using chi-squares ( $\chi^2$ ) (with one degree of freedom). Cohen (1992: 155-159) suggests a sample size of 69 for the detection of medium effect sizes in exploratory studies where  $\alpha = 0.10$ , with a statistical power specification of 0.80. The sample thus meets these requirements for statistical power.

### **Setting**

It was made quite clear to the subjects that the researcher would be objective and refrain from any personal comment or judgement. The findings would be presented in a truthful manner without attempting to please anyone. The interviewee was always made feel that s/he was valued as a person and not merely as a source of data. The subjects were not pressed to reveal more than they were ready to disclose, and they were encouraged to think that they were talking to someone who was sympathetic as well as curious.

Privacy was given by avoiding interviewing in public, and making appointments to visit people in their homes. The researcher was offered tea/coffee, and sometimes meals. He was welcomed into the interviewee's home as a guest, not merely tolerated as an inquisitor. Some

converts were invited to the researcher's home for dinner and the interview was done after the meal. However, a few interviewees preferred to be interviewed in public places like a mosque or an office where they worked. No matter where the respondents were met a few minutes of free conversation was always allowed before the interview started. During the interviews it was always ensured that there was no one else in the room. However, some women subjects who observe the Islamic precept that does not allow a man and woman to sit together on their own insisted someone else should be present during the interview. In this case they were asked if this third person could be the researcher's wife and in each case the suggestion was accepted.

### **Interview Design**

The interviews proceeded in chronological order beginning with childhood and family, adolescence, then exploring the two-year period prior to conversion and conversion process itself, and concluding with postconversion life and the present. Interview times ranged from forty-five minutes to two hours, most being about one and a quarter hours. All interviews were taped after permission to record the conversation and to use the transcriptions in writing the research had been gained. To protect the anonymity of the participants they were assured that fictional names would be used and when necessary other potentially revealing characteristics would be disguised. For this purpose each subject was also provided with a standard ethics protocol which is reproduced in the appendix A.

Before the interview began the converts were asked to fill in a form of preliminary questions (see appendix B), which was a set of biographical questions. These biographical questions allowed the researcher to ascertain the simple descriptive details of the respondent's life. Once the preliminaries were completed, the 'grand-tour' questions asked.

The subjects were allowed to tell their own story in their own terms. However, some control over the interview was exercised. The interview questionnaire (see appendix C) were open-ended and nondirective. The purpose of this relatively nondirective or free response beginning was to help each respondent examine, according to their own understanding, their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. As information was derived, spontaneous questions were used to gradually narrow the scope and focus on specific times, places, and people, etc. The "floating" and "planned" prompts to encourage the subject to go into detail where necessary were also employed. When the interviewee paused, a new question was not always asked. A few moments of silence was allowed. If this hesitation was a call for encouragement, then a reformulation of something the subject had just said was given. If the

subject had nothing to say on a given topic, either something mentioned earlier was referred back to, or a new question was posed

### **Shortcomings of the Research**

It was unclear whether the models and methods used to study Christian and new religious movement conversion (Scobie, 1973, Lofland and Stark, 1965, etc ) would be applicable to Islam. Some other limitations of the present investigation are also worth mentioning here. *First*, this study did not employ a control group and therefore was not able to examine non-converts to see whether they might be equally affected by the same influences. *Second*, it was unable to employ other informants like the parents or ex-friends of the subjects for cross-checking details of their previous life and the changes they underwent after conversion. *Third*, this study involves largely qualitative material, and could be regarded as involving a case-study (idiographic) approach. It may serve as a foundation for future work involving a nomothetic approach in which selected aspects of conversion processes are assessed. Such an attempt is made in examining conversion motifs in chapter IV. Because of the sampling methods employed, the findings may only apply to the people interviewed and cannot necessarily apply to other native British converts to Islam. *Finally*, the psychological literature on conversion consists of studies of individual case-histories and samples usually of convenience. Random community samples, or random selection methods within targeted groups, have sometimes been used (see appendix F). Therefore, the conclusions and comparisons throughout the thesis must be moderated by the fact that they are mostly based on samples which may not be representative.



**CHAPTER TWO**

**MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN**

## **A: IMMIGRANT MUSLIMS OF BRITAIN**

### **1- The History of Muslims in Britain**

The first close contact that Britain made with Islam came about when the British Imperial rule began in India. Britain conquered Bengal in the second half of the 18th century (1750) and expanded from Baluchistan to Burma and from Kashmir to Ceylon by the middle of the 19th century (1857) (Frazer, 1896: 318ff). In the late 19th century (1882) Britain occupied another Muslim country, Egypt, in another continent (Milner, 1902: 25). Over the centuries Britain's interests remained in the Muslim world, in the Middle East and the subcontinent and the British interacted with Muslims through various channels such as business and trade.

The period of history that is immediately relevant to the Muslim situation in Britain relates to British colonialism and the Commonwealth. Muslim migration and settlement in Great Britain is the result of a late imperial process common to all of Western Europe (Nielsen, 1984: 1). Muslim migration and settlement in Britain dates from the middle years of the 19th century when Muslim seamen from Yemen, Somalia and South Asia came to settle in such ports as Cardiff, Liverpool, and London (Collins, 1957: 11). Cardiff is the oldest Muslim centre of the United Kingdom. In the 1940s it was estimated that there were 700 Arab males, 150 Somali males, and 1000 Muslim children in Cardiff. They used to run their own mosque and school where instruction in the Qur'ān was given to children under the auspices of a resident shaykh and a small staff of assistants. By 1962 there were 7,000 Muslims in the Cardiff area mainly from Yemen, Aden and Somalia. During the Second World War the foreign seamen were employed at the same rates as British seamen (Little, 1948: 36, 110). With this concession, the Muslim seamen began to enjoy a greater degree of economic security and they began to concern themselves with settling down to a more permanent life-style. By this time it was not uncommon to find coffee houses and small oriental spice shops run by Muslim seamen opening up in the ports' areas. The areas of concentration were mainly Cardiff and Tyneside where the number of Yemenis and Adenese reached 12,000 in 1960 (Dahya, 1965: 177).

During the war years settlements expanded and became fully established by the end of the war. This stability created the opportunity for Muslim men to marry local girls and indeed some of the Yemeni men married local women. Intermarriages seem to have played an important role in Muslims' relations with the indigenous society and gave Muslims more confidence and hope about their future in Britain. Marriages were usually conducted in accordance with the Muslim

marriage rite (*nikah*) but this was not accepted by some English women, who insisted on a contract under the provisions of English law. In some cases, therefore, couples observed both forms. Although marriages would often result in the women converting to Islam, there were a few who chose to maintain their previous faith. Collins (1951: 799) observed that mixed marriages seemed successful between Muslim men and local women even if they had not converted to Islam were working.

During this time there were other Muslim groups arriving in Britain apart from the seamen. By the end of the Second World War the number of Indian Muslims in Britain had exceeded 30,000. In 1949 it was estimated that there were more than 43,000 Pakistanis, over 10,000 in London alone (Hunter, 1962: 17-8). There were Muslim students and professional men who came mainly from India. With the beginning of British rule in India and West Africa, Muslims from Africa and India came to Britain to be educated at public schools and universities (Singh, 1963: 11). Some of these students returned home after their education to enter the Indian Civil Service, politics or journalism, but some remained in Britain to practice law, medicine or politics (Hunter, 1962: 9). Many of these students and professional groups resided in and around London, but they did not form separate geographical or social units. Some had their businesses or practices in non-Muslim communities and became anglicised. The businessmen were frequently linked with companies that had interests in India (Allen, 1971: 34-5). Many of those who settled down in Britain maintained their Islamic culture and were instrumental in forming several Islamic societies during this period.

In more recent times, due to the industrial growth in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s large industrial cities such as London, Birmingham and Manchester have been attracting a rapidly increasing Muslim population. This period has brought a large number of Muslim migrants<sup>1</sup> to this country from the Indian subcontinent. Muslims, particularly from the Commonwealth countries, found their way to Britain in connection with trade, commerce, education and service.

Muslim migration and settlement in the 1950s, which may be called post-war migration, has many different characteristics in comparison to that which took place during the late 19th and early 20th century. It is different not only in terms of the nature and size of the migratory movement, but also the geographical and religious backgrounds of the migrants (Ally, 1982: 90, Clarke, 1988: 506). Unlike the Muslim settlements in and around the dockland areas of British

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<sup>1</sup> For the case of Muslims settled in Britain using the terms 'migrant' or 'immigrant' is a cause of confusion. The vast majority of the Muslims did not come to Britain for settlement in the first place. But nevertheless over the years they have tended to settle. Taking this point into consideration I preferred to use the word 'migrant' when I speak of early Muslims and the word 'immigrant' when I speak of present Muslim settlers.

seaports a century ago, it is characterised by a substantial Muslim settlement in the industrialised inner cities (Ally, 1982: 90). After the war due to rapid economic growth and post-war reconstruction there was an intense shortage of labour in Britain as well as Europe and the colonies became the best recruiting market. To this end Britain made systematic attempts to attract workers from abroad, and was able to exploit its historical links with India and Pakistan (Rose, et al, 1969: 78-81, Darsh, 1980: 48-9, Shaw, 1988: 12). Further, in the post-war period, due to the creation of the new independent states of Pakistan and Bangladesh, these countries were facing serious economical, social and political problems which was a catalyst for emigration (Allen, 1971: 36-7). Regarding religious background, in contrast to the West African origin Sufi oriented Yemeni and Arab groups, the Muslims of this new era were much more influenced by the 20th century religious groups of India and Pakistan, like the Jamā'at-i Islāmī and the Tablighi Jamā'at, and this of course affected the development of the religious institutions.

The second largest Muslim community migrating to Britain were Turkish Cypriots. The strife between the Greek and the Turkish community was exacerbated in the 1950s when the Greek population began to seek political union with Greece and many Turks decided to migrate to Britain. Many West and East Africans also came to Britain in the 1960s (Ally, 1982: 97, 103).

In analysing the history of Muslims in Britain one can identify that the primary motivating factor for the migratory movements in 1950s and 1960s was economic (Anwar, 1979: 25). Most of those who migrated at the beginning were unskilled workers. They were hardly educated in their own language and basic culture. They came alone with the ultimate intention of returning home after a few years. The overriding feature of Muslim migration as a whole is that it followed the pattern of the husband arriving first and being joined later by his wife and family. So there was a preponderance of male Muslims in the 1950s and 1960s in Britain (Rex and Moore, 1967: 116). Later under the impact of the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962, when Britain wanted to put an end to its "open door" policy, many non-working dependants and more workers arrived due to the threat of immigration control by the British government. The 1962 Act then imposed a system of regulation through the issue of employment vouchers of three categories according to their skills and qualifications. Finally, the 1971 Immigration Act made it impossible for all but the wealthiest entrepreneurs to enter the UK from the 'New Commonwealth', thus ending the chain of migration of single men. This Act still permitted the entry of dependants, although the mode of its operation and subsequent further restrictions delayed the arrival of many and prevented others from coming altogether (Rose, et al, 1969: 82-85). So the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 allowing the entry of a substantial number of dependants of workers already in Britain, led to a

more permanent settlement for Muslims and this fact increased the concern for community Religion in terms of establishing organisations, thus education became the primary concern

## **2- The Contemporary Muslim Community**

Britain's Muslims could be classified broadly as (a) immigrant workers, (b) students (there are about 30,000 Muslim students in British Universities) (Kettani, 1986 41), (c) professional and businessmen, (d) diplomatic business personnel, and (d) native British Muslims. It is the first group that is by far the most numerous and these are mainly persons intending to stay in Britain permanently (Johnstone, 1981 169)

There is no accurate figure for the total number of Muslims in Britain since Britain does not keep religious statistics. The estimates range from 750,000 to 1 million. The majority of the Muslim community, between 300,000 and 400,000, is from Pakistan. Other groups of Muslims include Bengalis (60,000), Indians (80,000), Turkish Cypriots (50,000), Turks (5,000-20,000), Arabs (120,000), Malaysians (30,000), East Africans (30,000-90,000), Iranians (25,000-50,000), Nigerians (20,000), and others (30,000) (see Nielsen, 1992 41). The vast majority of Muslims in Britain are *Sunni* but Britain also has around 25,000 *Shi'ite* Muslims from Iran and around 15,000 *Ahmadi's* from India (McHugh, 1990 36), who are considered to be outside the pale of Islam.

Geographically, the Muslim population is not uniformly spread throughout Britain. The majority of the Muslim population is resident in the largest industrial cities such as London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Bradford. The regional pattern varies considerably from one Muslim nationality to another, for instance, while Bengalis are settled in East London, Oldham and Bradford. Turkish Cypriots live in North and South East London (George, 1967 280-2, Ally, 1982 120-2, Nielsen, 1992 42-3)

During the first years of their migration, Muslims wished merely that they be allowed to work and earn for their families so that they could return. They did not intend to settle permanently and they knew they were coming to a strange society and their expectations were limited. This attitude led to a lack of desire to learn English or to set up social organisations. But over the years, with their families' arrival in the 1960s and 1970s this orientation changed in favour of settlement. Consequently the second generation now does not feel they are immigrants at all, Britain is their home. This growing tendency towards settlement, of course, has been accompanied by a parallel growth of ethnic socio-economic and religious institutions to cater for the community's need (Dahya, 1973 245, Ally, 1982 127). The Muslims began to take steps to emphasise their religious and cultural traditions and they built mosques and made religious instruction available to

their children by running Sunday schools, and occasionally full-time private primary/secondary schools

Although religious identification is generally strong among Muslims in Britain, the degree of religious observance and attending worship seem to be in decline when compared to that of home. For some it may be stronger than it would be back home because some who regard themselves as exiles in a strange land may identify more strongly with their own culture and religion. On the other hand, some who practised their religion in their country of origin may sometimes throw it to the wind when they come to Britain (Hunter, 1985: xi). The Muslim community seems to consist of both extremes. Some Muslims apparently take great pride in being anglicised, proving their "modernity" through adopting an English life-style in their homes. They gradually develop a self-centred, individualistic and secularist approach. One example for this is the Turkish Cypriot community that is more secularised than any other ethnic Muslim community. What is very obvious is that there is a trend towards a weakening in religious observance within the community as far as the second generation is concerned. Anwar (1986: 17), in a survey, covering nearly 8,000 Muslims, found that a higher percentage (35%) of young Muslims as compared with parents (20%) never go to a mosque. In their survey of Pakistanis Rex and Moore (1967: 170) concluded

"Although the Pakistani community remains apart socially and culturally from the host society, there are none the less some signs at the margins of lapsing both from Islam and from Pakistani culture. Religious duties are overlooked. An increasing number of Pakistanis drink alcohol."

#### **a) Major Social Problems of the Muslim Community**

Due to their ethnic and religious background, the Muslim community in Britain today faces problems relating to determining its identity and establishing itself as a community. Among them religious, racial, and educational problems as well as unemployment, and lack of leadership can be highlighted. Problems concerning the religious education of Muslim children and lack of a proper leadership have always been the areas that Muslims talk about most.

Muslims are mainly employed in the manufacturing industry, in particular in textiles and the metal industry. They tend to be concentrated in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. Besides the manufacturing industry there is economic activity in the retail and service sector generated mainly by Pakistanis. These include corner butchers, newsagents, chemists, etc. They are also running restaurants, cafes and sub-post offices (Bakhash, 1982: 37). There is also a growing number of businessmen and professionals. It is estimated that there are about 10,000 Muslim doctors working in the British NHS, between 15,000 to 17,000 working as teachers, and as many as

20,000 are employed as engineers and scientists (Anwar, 1980 111) The unemployment rate among Muslims is significantly high The Department of Labour estimates that unemployment among young people (16 to 24 years of age) of Pakistani and Bengali extraction is currently running at 37 percent, the highest of any ethnic or age group in Britain (Evans, 1989b 12)

It is estimated that there are 350,000 Muslims of school-going age For them there are three types of Islamic educational institution available First, there are the mosque schools Second, there are schools run in private homes or in separate places Third, the primary or secondary schools There are about 15 of the latter type, such as Al-Isra Islamic College in Malvern, Worcestershire and the Islamic College in East London (Mohammad, 1991 35) These schools are self-funded and Muslims are becoming increasingly devoted to establishing Muslim schools within the state system Muslims like Yusuf Islam, who has set up a primary and a secondary school of this kind, have been in the forefront of this struggle Demand for such schools has been refused so far on the basis that "they would be socially divisive and retard the improvement of race relations " (Nielsen, 1984 14) There is only one small organisation called *the Muslim Educational Trust* that can provide religious education to Muslim children in a few county schools where there are a sizeable number of Muslim children<sup>2</sup> The reality is that Muslim youth feel half Westernised and half Easternised and consequently confused and lacking direction Those who do turn to Islam usually do so when the main stream culture rejects them racially This brings about the reactionary type of religious sentiment that may lead them to extremism All these factors, taken together, lead to a failure to create a strong Muslim identity As a result, Muslims often suffer from weak identities or low self images

A major worry for Muslim parents is the fact that their children soon begin to adopt English standards and ideas (Iqbal, 1975 10) The community in general fears that their younger generation will become westernised, and will lose their cultural heritage and religion Being educated in the generally liberal, "think-for-yourself" atmosphere of British schools against the prescriptive atmosphere at home, Muslim children find themselves at the centre of cultural conflict but as they grow up they often resolve the problem by adopting some aspects of Western culture and behaviour while retaining many of their traditional values and attitudes (Hiro, 1971 175) An interview study revealed that most of the parents were fearful of "the influence of the west on immature minds" and they speak of a "communication gap" between the generations as a result of their children being brought up in Britain and adopting "different moral values" (Wilkinson, 1989 18) The two generations differ in that Muslim adults, reared and educated in the Indian

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<sup>2</sup> Leaflet distributed by Muslim Educational Trust, n d

subcontinent, were not strongly exposed to British values, Christian thought, and Western civilisation, whereas their children are. A survey conducted in recent years revealed that almost half of the Muslim parents (47%) and 41% of young Muslims felt that the children are influenced by Christianity. 80% of both parents and children agreed that there is not sufficient formal teaching of Islam (Anwar, 1986: 15-6)

One of the other central questions for British Muslims is who speaks for them? This question has never been asked so much until recent years when two major events occurred concerning British Muslims: The Rushdie Affair of 1989 and The Gulf War of 1991. Since the Muslim community has been primarily uneducated, there has always been a vacuum of leadership. The control of British Muslim politics has been mainly held by two groups: (a) a collection of imported *īmāms*, and (b) self-proclaimed leaders. Muslim groups from different ethnic backgrounds import *īmāms* from their countries of origin. Many *īmāms* are graduates of a *madrasah* where they learn the outward forms of religious observance. Many of these *īmāms* are believed to have divided the Muslim community by engaging in battles for power (Sardar, 1991: 19). They attract members of the working class who lack a true knowledge of Islam. They are ignorant about the context in which they are resident and they are not acquainted with the socio-political context of the British culture (Mohammad, 1991: 32-3). Self-appointed leaders are not as numerous as traditional leaders. They emerged when the community was establishing itself in the Sixties and early Seventies, and being from the professions such as medicine or accountancy their opinions carried more weight since the majority of Muslims were illiterate and had migrated in search of earning a livelihood. This immediately created a division between the educated, and the uneducated leading to the creation of the professional status-elite (Mohammad, 1991: 32) and many Muslims looked towards such people for guidance. Most of the current leaders came to power during this period and they have stayed ever since. Many of them discouraged the community from integrating into the wider society arguing that "If we integrate, we will lose our identity" (Sardar, 1991: 19).

Both of the above mentioned types of leadership of the Muslim community have come under attack by some Muslim intellectuals since they have been preoccupied with their own rivalries and thus have not made any attempt to exert an influence on the political system in Britain. They have also been accused of being extreme and misleading the community in political matters related to religion. This was reflected in the mutual recriminations of Muslim groups in the Muslim press during and after the Rushdie Affair.



In conclusion, Muslim immigrants are escapees from their own countries of origin for economic reasons. Lying at the root of current problems among Muslims is the fact that they have little experience of living as a minority in a country where they exercise virtually no political power. The following account from the Muslim Manifesto of 1990, which attempted to set up a Muslim Parliament, outlines the fact that Muslims in Britain are not in charge of their destiny

" So far we have been an ad hoc community in almost every respect. Everything about us has been ad hoc. Our coming to Britain and our settlement here has been more by default than by design. Very little about us has been thought and planned. We have not been in charge of our destiny."<sup>3</sup>

### **b) Mosques and Organisations**

In the last four or five decades while Britain has been witnessing settlement of Muslim immigrants, Muslims have established their own places of worship and organisations of which the vast majority have their roots in the country of origin. Most of them have a local character and their activities are very limited, but some have a nationwide effect within the community. There were about 80 mosques in 1970 (Hiro, 1971: 146), and around 250-300 in the 1980s (Anwar, 1980: 111, Clarke, 1988: 507, Nielsen, 1992: 45). Now their number is estimated at over 1,000 (Mohammad, 1991: 49), most being small and located in terraced houses. Organised religious activities take place in the mosques under the auspices of Muslim organisations. The mosque in the British Muslim community has often become an instrument of sectarianism and a forum ground for power politics back in the homeland. In the early years, a number of small local Muslim advisory groups cared for the needs of the community. As numbers increased, larger national organisations emerged concerned with welfare, education, *da'wah* (mission) and other matters. In every city where there is a Muslim community there are scores of Muslim organisations. The majority of the Muslim organisations are small existing mainly on paper, but some are large and popular at grass roots level because they are a reflection of the movements or political parties that exist in the country of origin. Some of the most well-known and nationwide organisations are UK Islamic Mission, Islamic Foundation, Islamic Propagation Centre, Islamic Cultural Centre, Tablighi Jamā'at, Ahlī Hadīth, and Muslim Institute. Now we will examine some of them.

### **Islamic Propagation Centre<sup>4</sup>**

The Islamic Propagation Centre was set up in 1984 in Birmingham with the following objectives, (a) to present Islam to Non-Muslims with whatever means most effective, (b) to educate Muslims about Islam and comparative religions, (c) to distribute free over one million booklets and

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<sup>3</sup> Draft Proposal for the Setting Up the Muslim Parliament, September 1990, Issued by The Muslim Institute

<sup>4</sup> Islamic Propagation Centre, 481 Coventry Road, Small Heath, Birmingham, B10 0JS

pamphlets on Islam and comparative religions to Muslims and non-Muslims, (d) to organise lectures, and debates throughout the country, (e) to distribute audio and video tapes on Islam and comparative religions and give numerous free copies of the Qur'ān to non-Muslims<sup>5</sup>

The Centre has several objectives with regard to da'wah as opposed to other Muslim organisations in Britain. It believes that it is Muslims' duty to keep calling Christians to a "true" conception of God on the basis of reason and revelation, both Biblical and Qur'ānic. Such da'wah by the Muslims is part of the process which will lead to the final victory of Monotheism. The founder of the centre is Ahmed Deedat who is well-known for his polemical attacks upon Christian teaching. To understand the aims of the Centre it is worth looking into the life of its founder.

Ahmed Deedat was a South African shop assistant with very little formal education. Opposite the shop where he was working was the office of an American evangelist mission. Christian missionaries used to visit the shop to buy food and other things. One of them started preaching Christianity to young Deedat. He argued with them that "The Qur'ān was copied from the Bible and that Islam was spread by the sword." Deedat did not know anything about any of these issues. He felt like leaving his job and running away. One day while he was clearing up the shop owner's old books, he found a book entitled *Izhar-ul-Haq* (the truth revealed). He was fascinated by the title and he started reading it. He thought that he found answers to most of the questions raised by the Christian missionary worker. Reading this book changed his life. In 1958 he left his job as a salesman and started the Islamic Propagation Centre in Durban, S. Africa, (Abdullah, 1986a: 93, Deedat, 1987: 62-3) which is the mother organisation of the Islamic Propagation Centre in Britain. He visited Britain several times in the 1980s, and galvanised the Muslim youth into a renewed confidence about spreading Islam. He also had public debates with Christian scholars (Johnstone, 1986: 189). His style is often vitriolic, much to the delight of the crowds. Some Muslims, however, find his style very aggressive and often provocative (Abdullah, 1986a: 93).

The Islamic Propagation Centre of Britain is located in Birmingham. In addition to the use of conventional publication materials, the centre also exploits the use of modern technology like video and audio tapes. Audio-visual materials are the cassettes and video tapes of Deedat's lectures such as "Is Jesus God?", "Christ in Islam" and "Islam and Christianity", including Deedat's debates with Christian scholars.

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<sup>5</sup> Leaflet distributed by the Islamic Propagation Centre, March/April 1990

### **The Islamic Foundation<sup>6</sup>**

The Islamic Foundation is a pioneering organisation that specialises in the publication of Islamic literature in English in Britain. At present it has 150 titles on its publication list.<sup>7</sup> The Foundation, consisting of Indian, Pakistani and Bengali Muslims, sees itself as contributing to the da'wah of the Islamic movements. It was set up in 1966 under the leadership of Khurshid Ahmad, who is a trained economist and an early follower of Mawdūdī (1903-1979), the founder of the Jamā'at-i Islāmī. Khurshid Ahmad is an internationally recognised activist. He was a member of the Foreign Section of the Jamā'at-i Islāmī in Pakistan when he moved to Britain in 1968 where he resided until 1978. After that he went back to Pakistan to serve in the cabinet of Zia ul-Haq. During his stay in Britain, his assignment was to engage in the world-wide propagation of Islam in Europe, Africa and America (Esposito and Voll, 1990: 30). As an extension of this ideal he established the Islamic Foundation in Leicester.

The foundation is inspired by Jamā'at-i-Islāmī's outlook and ideals. It publishes and distributes Islamic books, including the translations of Mawdūdī's writings, and journals. It produces a newsletter called Focus on Christian-Muslim Relations. It has units on Education, Islamic Economics, Inter-faith Relationships, and Islam in Europe, and conducts conferences, and engages in ecumenical programs. It has recently set up a support and contact project for new Muslims in Britain.

### **The Muslim Institute<sup>8</sup>**

The Muslim Institute was established in 1974 by the Pakistani scholar Kalim Siddiqui in London. The Institution is of the opinion that to further the progress of Muslim civilisation in the future, there must arise a group of scholars who are able to draw from both the "traditional" and the "modern" sources, and are able to synthesise both forms of knowledge, so as to produce a new form of scholastic framework that transcends all national and ethnic barriers that now divide Muslims.<sup>9</sup> The Institute organises courses on Islam and holds seminars on current issues in the Muslim world as well as Islam in general. It also publishes a news magazine called Crescent.

Having prepared a Muslim Manifesto the Institute set up a Muslim Parliament (or The Council of British Muslims), and a common programme for all parts of the Muslim community to pursue together in Britain. The Institute convened representatives from the Muslim community on

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<sup>6</sup> The Islamic Foundation, 223 London Road, Leicester LE2 1ZE

<sup>7</sup> Leaflet distributed by the Islamic Foundation, n.d.

<sup>8</sup> The Muslim Institute, 6 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DS

<sup>9</sup> The Muslim Institute. Draft Prospectus, 1977

14th July 1990 in the Institute of Education, London On the same day the originator of the plan for the Muslim Parliament, the director of the Muslim Institute, Kalim Siddiqui summarised their intentions and aims by the setting up of the Manifesto

" The Muslim Manifesto defines our situation today and sets out goals that we should attain over the next 30 years The Muslim manifesto is a programme for the entire Muslim community in Britain and not for any part of it The Muslim Manifesto proposes the setting up of a 'Muslim Parliament', or the Council of British Muslims "10

Siddiqui in later days also made it clear that the Parliament would not be a separatist one "We are an integral part of Britain, but will not accept the imposition of integration We will integrate at our speed and on our own terms "(Wahhab, 1991)

The idea of the Institute to set up a Muslim Parliament is based on the assumption that Muslims need a body that can speak on their behalf Muslims, according to the Manifesto, needs a parliament of their own, (a) to fight all forms of oppression and secure an honourable place in the wider British society, (b) to develop their own identity and culture within Britain and as part of a global Muslim community, (c) to develop a microcosm of unity across the cultural, ethnic and theological diversity found in the Muslim community in Britain, (d) to insist that Muslim culture and identity must not be lost through 'integration' 11

The parliament is made up of two houses The Upper House (or House of Experts), and The Lower House The Upper House contains around 1,000 men and women of high achievement, and proven ability Its primary functions is said to help Muslims in Britain achieve the highest possible levels of success and prosperity in all walks of life, to debate and consider such issues as (a) business outlook, employment and economic conditions in Europe, (b) review of developments affecting Muslims in the UK and Europe, (c) Islam in world politics and the state of Muslims After due debate the Upper House passes resolutions or make recommendations Members of the Upper House, apart from debating in plenary sessions, may set up committees and commissions to deal with specialised fields in trade, commerce, industry and the professions The Lower House has 200 members chosen from among the dedicated and committed community workers Its primary functions is, (a) to act as the representative body of Muslims in Britain, (b) to define, defend and promote Muslim interest in Britain, (c) to keep under constant review the legislative plans of government and opposition as they affect Muslims, (d) to debate all

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10 "Generating 'Power' without Politics", Speech by Kalim Siddiqui at one day conference on the 'Future of Muslims in Britain', London Muslim Institute, 14 July 1990

11 The Muslim Manifesto-a Strategy for Survival, The Muslim Institute, n d

major issues to try and promote consensus and unity among Muslims, (e) to mobilise the economic and political power of Muslims in Britain <sup>12</sup>

### **Tablighi Jamā'at**

Tablighi Jamā'at (also known as Jamā'at al-Tabligh) is an international Muslim missionary organisation which aims to remind Muslims of their faith, or to bring them back to the knowledge of what it regards as the true elements of the faith (King, in press) It was founded in pre-partition India (Delhi) in 1927 and continued to exist in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and East Africa It has already spread over more than 30 countries around the world (Haq, 1972 186) The Jamā'at are active in many European countries where there are large number of Muslim immigrants <sup>13</sup> The Tablighi Jamā'at could be described as the active expression of the piety of the Deobandi movement since it insists on an individual internalisation of the faith combined with external performance of the religious duties (Nielsen, 1992 133) As a movement it carries the drive and orientation of early nineteenth-century Delhi and of Deoband into the later twentieth century giving it a new edge in its central purpose of Islamic education on a massive scale It aims to correct the Muslim's worship and help him to perfect his relationship with God (Robinson, 1988 15)

The founder of the Jamā'at was Muhammad Ilyas (1886-1944), a leading Deobandi, who incorporated certain Sufi ideas and practices into his work and separated politics from its scheme of activities Ilyas believed that the Muslims of his time were ignorant of their faith and were steeped in the customs and traditions of Hinduism Muhammad Ilyas started going from person to person calling upon them to observe the tenets of Islam, and also inviting them to join him in the work of calling other Muslims towards the fundamentals of Islam He was aiming to motivate people to adopt da'wah work as a way of life Then he began sending groups for short periods of time to various centres in the region of Mewat in India (Qurashi, 1989 241) He believed that it was necessary to create a feeling among Muslims that they were Muslims In order to bring them back to pure Islam, his main thrust was to do missionary work and he listed in detail the objectives of his movement as follows (a) Muslims are ignorant of even the basic articles of faith Therefore, the first preaching should be of that article which asserts the divinity of God, (b) one should engage in remembrance of God (dhikr) and acquiring knowledge (of religion) three times a day according to one's ability, (c) holding the above as the basic duty of a Muslim, one should set out to spread the same message everywhere, (d) On these da'wah tours everyone should resolve to practice

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<sup>12</sup> Draft proposals for the setting up of the Muslim Parliament, The Muslim Institute, September 1990

<sup>13</sup> For instance, for the activities of the Jamaat in Belgium see, Dassetto, 1988, pp 159-173

politeness, courtesy and earnestness in fulfilling one's duties, (e) every action should be performed to obtain the pleasure of God (Haq, 1972, 75)

In 1944 when Ilyas died his son Muhammad Yusuf took over the responsibility for the leadership and he expanded the movement to all parts of India, Pakistan, throughout the Middle-East, United States, Japan and to Britain (Haq, 1972 162) Yusuf died in 1965 and since then the movement has been directed by In'am ul Hassan, Ilyas' cousin The Jamā'at came into existence in Britain in the 1960s when travelling members began their mission (King, in press) The centre of the Jamā'at in Britain was set up in Dewsbury where they completed building a mosque in 1980, and a madrasah in 1982, where now there are 200 students educated to be *imāms* or teachers Over the years the Jamā'at extended its work throughout Britain and spread all over the country through the mosques " (Raza, 1991 14) Its main mission from the beginning, the Jamā'at addresses, is to function as a barrier against materialism and the predominance of worldly ambitions which would overtake Muslim immigrants living in Britain, or in western society

Members follow the principles laid down by Ilyas and the method he used in his da'wah After a gathering in the mosque groups of members under an *amir* (group leader) move out from door to door in the neighbourhood and collect the people in the mosque where they will exhort them to observe their duty to Allah (see King, in press) Because of their door to door activity they are defined as the Jehovah's Witnesses of Islam by some Muslims Their main target is Muslims who have become neglectful of the pillars of Islam or regard themselves as nominal Muslims In Britain the movement has been popular among Muslims who have been or are in a minority position Therefore they have a great following among those Muslims who came from India and East Africa

Members of the Jamā'at are polite, courteous, peaceful, and are said to be the least involved in controversy of any kind among Muslim groups in Britain (Robinson, 1988, 16, King, in press) Tabligh members stress that they are concerned entirely and exclusively with religious and moral matters They take no explicit interest in politics and take no view on political questions which applies both to British politics and homeland politics in Pakistan and India. They emphasise that setting a good example in social behaviour combined with individual piety is the key element in restoring Islamic society or winning others to Islam (Ahmad and Ansari, 1979)

One other similar but less known movement in Britain is Tabligh ul-Islam (World Islamic Mission) which was founded by the followers of Ahmad Ridā Khan (1856-1921) of India under the patronage of Ahmad Noorani Siddiqui Ridā Khan's thinking was rooted in the Qādiriyah Sufi

order, and his aim was to remove the Hindu elements that had penetrated into Islam. Their primary objective in Britain is to undertake da'wah among Muslims and non-Muslims and provide imāms for the mosques. The headquarters of the movement is in London<sup>14</sup> and their activities have expanded to Birmingham, Bradford, Leicester, Coventry and Nottingham. They established the Islamic Missionary College in Bradford.

Apart from sectarian and mission organisations there are a substantial number of service (charity, educational, etc.) organisations in Britain. They include charities such as Muslim Aid, London, and Islamic Relief, Birmingham, and such organisations as the Muslim Women's Association and Muslim Educational Trust.

### **Conclusion**

It may be concluded then that though the Muslims of Britain are a religious and cultural entity, they are not yet an organised community. It has been suggested that there are three options for Muslims in Britain: *assimilation*, *isolation* and *integration* (Mohammad, 1991: 107). Muslims do live in isolation to some extent in terms of living according to their tradition and religion but politically and economically they seem to have integrated into British structure. It appears that there is a willingness among Muslims in Britain to adapt to the social structure of this country without losing their identity as Muslims. As a community they have become a part of the social structure of the new society (Anwar, 1986: 6, 20). In this respect, Muslims can be classified as an integrating community in general.

In the late 19th century and in the early 20th century, while Britain was witnessing the migration of the Muslim population the number of converts to Islam was relatively increasing. Now we turn to the history of native British Muslims who converted to Islam.

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<sup>14</sup> Tabligh ul-Islam, 201-207 Shoreditch High St., London, E1

## **B: NATIVE BRITISH MUSLIMS**

### **1- The History of Native British Muslims**

The reports of conversions to Islam in Britain do not trace back before the late 19th century. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries there were some English converts to Islam in Britain and the first two Islamic organisations led by converts were growing while migrants were settling. At that time in Britain, there were some Muslim students and professionals. Since the students and professionals came from a high class in their own society and they had a good command of English, they easily moved among British middle and upper class society. They were able to attract the interest of their hosts more than the seamen settled in dockland areas (Ally, 1982: 48). The first conversion of an Englishman in this period was that of a peer called Lord Stanley of Alderley (see Clark, 1986: 41). This was followed by the conversion of William H. Quilliam of Liverpool, a well-known lawyer and an eloquent speaker. Quilliam's journey to Morocco in 1887 gave him the opportunity to study Islam and he soon became Muslim.<sup>15</sup> He went on to become the founder of the Liverpool Mosque and Muslim Institute. Now the two Islamic organisations which are led by converts will be examined.

#### **a) The Liverpool Mosque and Muslim Institute**

After his conversion Quilliam began to spread the message of Islam and steadily made converts. His first converts were his own family, including his mother and his three sons. He published a number of booklets and from 1893 to 1908 he issued a weekly, *The Crescent* (Clark, 1986: 39). The first booklet ran into three editions in English and was translated into 13 languages. After publishing these booklets he became a well-known name in the Muslim world. His efforts resulted in prominent scientists, teachers and people in the professions as well as a few spinsters and widows accepting Islam (Ally, 1982: 49). Quilliam undertook social work in the interest of spreading Islam and he founded a house called *Medina House* which was a home for 20 or 30 foundlings who were brought up as Muslims (Ally, 1982: 56). Mothers of the babies were required to sign a special clause stating that they would be brought up as Muslims.<sup>16</sup> Quilliam travelled around Britain and lectured on Islam, using non-Islamic networks like *Manx clubs* and *Temperance Societies* and he claimed up to 150 British adherents (Clark, 1986: 39).

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<sup>15</sup> "Sheikh Abdullah Quilliam", *The Islamic World*, 1896, pp. 202-213.

<sup>16</sup> *The Islamic World*, July 1896, pp. 68-70.



Quilliam built up international Islamic contacts as well. The Shah of Persia nominated him as Persian consul for Liverpool and he received a personal gift from the *Amīr* of Afghanistan. With this money he purchased the West Derby premises which was used as an Islamic Institute and a residence for himself and his family. In 1890, he was invited by the Ottoman Sultan to visit Istanbul and the Sultan soon appointed him *Shaykh al-Islām* of the British Isles. One of his sons named Ahmad later became British Consul general in Turkey (Ally, 1982: 50). In 1891 Quilliam became Shaykh Abdullah Quilliam after he established the "Liverpool Mosque and Institute". The institute was able to establish a "Muslim College" and offer full-time courses to both Muslim and non-Muslim students (Ally, 1982: 56). There were courses in the pure sciences, history, and languages (Arabic and European).<sup>17</sup> Through running these educational programmes one of the aims of the institute was to attract the attention of non-Muslims. For this purpose the institute also ran a weekly literary and debating society.

Quilliam followed an appropriate strategy in his missionary activity. He always bore in mind the background of the people he was addressing and tried to make potential converts feel at home while they were given da'wah. For this end he organised morning and evening services on Sundays. He acknowledged that

"Most of the people in this country are Christians and are accustomed in their churches and chapels to a certain form of service, consisting generally of the singing of a chant, some hymns, the reading of a chapter from the Bible and a sermon from the clergyman. These people had to be brought gradually into the faith consequently to make them feel more at home at the missionary meetings, we held a service something like the one they had been accustomed to."<sup>18</sup>

On Sunday mornings prayer and meditation were held and this was followed by a congregational meeting in the evening. Both services were held in the lecture hall of the institute.<sup>19</sup> The congregational meeting consisted of singing of hymns in English and was specifically designed for those who were already on their way or were about to convert. Quilliam himself compiled some hymns and entitled it, "Hymns suitable for English-speaking Muslim congregation". Many of them were taken from Evangelical poets and divines. Some of them were adapted to conform to Islamic beliefs (Ally, 1982: 58).

In the early part of the 20th century, Quilliam's extended activities began to attract antagonism and pressure from both the local community and from the media, as well as some of the churches. According to *the Islamic World* this antagonism was largely because of Quilliam's

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<sup>17</sup> *The Islamic World*, July 1896, 72, 116

<sup>18</sup> *The Islamic World*, July 1896, 99

<sup>19</sup> *The Islamic World*, July 1896, 98

ability to attract a significant number of converts<sup>20</sup> This antipathy towards Quilliam was also caused by his public condemnation of the church He wrote letters to the church criticising their missionary activities in Muslim countries (Ally, 1982, 62) He also issued a proclamation to Egyptian soldiers in 1896, criticising the British policy over Sudan and urging Muslim soldiers in the British army to refrain from taking up arms against the Muslims of Sudan<sup>21</sup> This was the last straw that forced Quilliam to leave the country and he was reported to have left Liverpool to go and live in the East in 1908 (Ally, 1982, 62) After Quilliam had left Liverpool, the mosque and the institution declined and eventually closed (Siddiq, 1934, 14) Quilliam's son, Bilal, sold off the West Derby premises which was registered in Quilliam's name It is not known what happened to Quilliam after that, but it was assumed that he and his sons went to Turkey with many other converts from Liverpool. It was also speculated that one of his sons joined the Ottoman Army There was also a rumour that Quilliam came back to Britain under a pseudo name in 1920s While the movement was in decline in Liverpool there was another mission growing up in Woking This mission consisted of many converts too, and it was led by them in its later years

#### **b) The Woking Mission**

The Woking mission began with the building of a mosque in Woking in 1889, which was to be the first mosque in the London area and Muslims were the first non-Judea-Christian community in Britain to establish a place of worship of their own (Hiro, 1971, 146) The mosque came into being at the inspiration of Dr Leitner, a Hungarian orientalist who settled in Britain after retirement from the post of registrar at the University of Punjab Besides the mosque, Dr Leitner also arranged for the building of an Indian student hostel and an institute as a place of oriental learning (Haqq, 1930, 242) The mosque in Woking became a centre for Muslim religious activity and an Islamic mission that was responsible for attracting many converts to Islam (Siddiq, 1934, 16) After the death of Dr Leitner in 1899 the mosque and adjacent buildings were left in a neglected state for many years until a Lahore barrister, Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din of India came to England in 1912 as a Muslim missionary with the objective of working for conversions Kamal-ud-Din based himself at Richmond, Surrey, and held meetings at Hyde-Park (Yemeni, 1933, 128, Ally, 1982, 64, Clark, 1986, 40) He initiated a monthly called *Muslim India and Islamic Review* In 1913 he shifted to Woking and took possession of the mosque, which was owned by the heirs of Dr Leitner He had the building repaired and within months the Woking mission was established The objectives of the mission were to remove misconceptions about Islam in Britain (Ally, 1982, 66) Kamal-ud-Din kept on publishing the monthly, which in the following years changed its name to *Islamic Review*

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<sup>20</sup> *The Islamic World*, July 1896, 86-87

<sup>21</sup> *The Islamic World*, July 1896, 98, Clark, 1986, 39

and *Modern India* before settling down to the *Islamic Review* in 1921 (Siddiq, 1934 19, Clark, 1986 41)

The Woking Mission's first influential conversion was when an English lord, Lord Headley who later took the name of al-Haj al-Farooq, converted to Islam in 1913 <sup>22</sup> His conversion was very significant for Islam in Britain. It drew the attention of the British public to Islam as a faith that might be personally relevant to British individuals (Ally, 1982 70, Clark, 1986 41). Lord Headley was an engineer until he succeeded his cousin in 1913 to become the fifth Baron and the 11th holder of the baronetcy of Nostell, Yorkshire, and the fifth holder of the baronetcy of Little Warsely, Essex. He was brought up as a Protestant, but also studied Roman Catholicism at Trinity College, Cambridge, and was struck by what he called their "believe this or be damned!" attitude. His contact with Islam came about when he went to India in 1896 as a contract engineer. When he returned to England it was not until he met Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din that he decided to announce publicly his conversion to Islam, as he wrote in an article after the death of Kamal-ud-Din (Headley, 1933 109-114).

Lord Headley's conversion was followed by a group of British converts to Islam, amongst whom were John (Yehya) Parkinson, S. Musgrave, Khalid Sheldrake, Dr. N. J. Whyment, Noor-ed-Din Stephen, and Prof. H. Marcel (Mustafa) Leon (Sheldrake, 1915, 4-7). Prof. Leon was a former lecturer at the Liverpool Mosque and a long time associate of A. Quilliam. After meeting Lord Headley he became a close colleague of Headley, and together they developed the Woking mission through an autonomous body called the *British Muslim Society* under the presidency of Headley in 1914 to propagate Islam in Britain (Sheldrake, 1915 4). Many members of the society were from the middle class and the aristocracy of British society with experience of India or other Muslim countries as servicemen or as daughters or wives of servicemen. The society met regularly for Friday prayers and for Sunday services at Woking Mosque. Sunday services were held in the form of a ceremony for those who wished to announce their faith in Islam. The society organised public meetings and lectures on a weekly basis. On some occasions, such as the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, the society would organise a celebratory meeting at one of London's leading hotels. Most of those who attended were new or potential converts (Siddiq, 1934 20-1, Ally, 1982 73).

The strategy they used to carry out missionary work was very important. The society and its president Lord Headley, presented Islam in a very delicate way. The objective of the society was to show that Islam was not "antagonistic or hostile" to Christianity (Ally, 1982 75). Islam would

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<sup>22</sup> New York Times, 21 December 1913, cited in *The Islamic Review*, 1933, 4-5, 110

be shown as easy to the potential convert, or to the new convert. They thought, for example, it might be too much to expect "the busy city man" to pray five times a day at the appointed times. It would be all right for him to send up his silent prayer. Lord Headley's remark on these points was that, "There are many things in this world desirable but not essential."<sup>23</sup> He was of the opinion that if insistence were made on the strict observance of "minor" points then they would be laying themselves open to the charges they themselves make against Christians who insist that certain ceremonies and beliefs are necessary (Headley, 1927: 238). He was also very careful about politics. He would not involve himself in politics as Quilliam of Liverpool did. In his presidential address in 1915 he made it clear that the society should not involve itself in politics since Britain was at war with the Ottomans at that time.<sup>24</sup>

The Mission's monthly journal, the *Islamic Review*, was its mouthpiece. It contained writings on religions and articles on various aspects of Islam, mostly in comparison with Christianity. Announcements were also made to attract discussions from non-Muslims, in which it was said "The Muslim church welcomes Non-Muslims as well. Collections are dispensed with and healthy criticism is encouraged."<sup>25</sup> Most of the writings in the journal were done by converts. One other feature of the journal was that it announced the name and the number of new converts, sometimes accompanied with their pictures. Nearly each issue consisted of one or two convert's biography (or autobiography) as well as their reasons for converting to Islam.

"The English brotherhood is growing steadily. Several people joined Islam formally this month. A young Londoner, who has been given Abdulaziz as his Islamic name, bids fair to develop into an earnest worker. Madam Bloch, of Brighton, also deserves particular mention for the devotion that she displayed for her co-religionist and newly-adopted faith on her visit to the mosque. The Muslim name given to her is Noor-Jahan (i.e., the light of the world). It is hoped that she will put forth efforts to spread the light and show the truth to those among whom she is living."<sup>26</sup>

People intending to convert were invited either to call at the mosque (it may be the prayer hall) or they were given the option of writing to the mission. Some converts sent their declaration of faith and transcriptions of these letters were published in the journal. A letter from a convert named Sarah is as follows:

"Dear Mr. Deen, I enclose my announcement. I hope you will allow me to join the Muslim faith. I do hereby testify that there is no other God or object of worship and to be served but One-Allah, I do testify that Muhammad is the prophet of God. I do not believe in the divinity of Jesus, but I accept him as a prophet of God with other prophets, like Abraham, Moses, Solomon, and David and

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<sup>23</sup> Lord Headley's presidential address at British Muslim Society, *Islamic Review and Muslim India*, 1915, 13, 9-16.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> *Islamic Review and Muslim India*, 1915, 12, 607.

<sup>26</sup> *Islamic Review and Muslim India*, 1915, 5, 217.

others I believe in the Divine Message of all prophets of the world I do not make any distinction between them I do accept the Qur'ān as the last book of God to perfect religion I do promise to act according to the injunction of the Qur'ān, and lead a Muslim life God help me so Amen <sup>27</sup>

The *Islamic Review* kept its readers informed of activities, religious or social It also functioned as a community newsletter in which news about the members were announced As understood from the *Islamic Review* in 1924 the number of Muslims in Britain was estimated at 10,000, largely consisting of Muslim students from overseas and the estimated figure of British converts from Christianity was approximately 1,000 who were scattered around the country <sup>28</sup> But there is no other written testimony available confirming these figures

The activities of the mission also included preparing literature for the British public expounding the teaching of Islam A long list of publications were issued on such subjects as "*Muhammad and Jesus*" The mission also collaborated with other Muslim organisations One of them was the *Muslim Literary Society* that developed under the presidency of A Yusuf Ali famed as a translator of the Qur'ān into English The famous Qur'ān translator M Pickthall, a convert to Islam, was also among members of this society (Ally, 1982 78, Clark, 1986 40)

After the death of the two key figures, Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din in 1932 and Lord Headley in 1933, the mission was taken over by a new committee Although it continued after the Second World War till the 1960s it has lost its popularity for two reasons (Ally, 1982 82) *Firstly*, because of the allegations about the mission being an *Ahmadiyyah* movement due to Kamal-ud-Din's *Ahmadi* background, though the allegations were previously denied <sup>29</sup> *Secondly*, with the development of the *Central Mosque* and *East London Mosque* in London its influence weakened

The Woking mission seems to have been successful in attracting many conversions among middle and upper class society in Britain The answer to the question of "Why the mission was successful?" lies within the fact that its president and first members were prominent Englishmen and they, making use of being Englishmen, used a methodology which was not alien to British people, such as holding morning and evening assemblies or giving parties at London's big hotels on special occasions or sometimes calling the Woking Mosque, a "Muslim Church" The message was from Englishman to Englishman In addition, Islam was presented to the potential convert as compatible with being a Westerner Being a convert had always been presented as being a "better Christian" rather than denouncing Christianity To take an example, having given

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<sup>27</sup> *Islamic Review and Muslim India*, 1915, 2, 60

<sup>28</sup> *The Islamic review*, 1924, 3, 118-120, Clark, 1986 41

<sup>29</sup> *The Islamic Review*, 1935, 3, 81

the reasons for adopting the teachings of Islam Lord Headley declared that "I consider myself by that very act a far better Christian than I was before" (Bawany, 1961: 19)

While the Woking mission was in action, another prominent Englishman, Marmaduke Pickthall, announced his conversion to Islam in London in 1917 at the age of 42 and took the name Muhammad. A few years later his wife followed him into Islam. Pickthall (1875-1936) is best remembered among Muslims as a translator of the Qur'ān. He was also a novelist. He published 15 novels and short stories mainly about the Near East. His last two novels after his conversion are considered the first English Islamic novels. Pickthall was an English Tory and opposed British schemes and the war against the Ottoman Empire, which estranged him from his fellow countrymen. He was interested in the Middle East and lived in Muslim countries for many years. Pickthall came from a devout Church of England family. His father was a clergyman. Soon after his conversion he advanced to a position of leading prayers at the mosque in Notting Hill Gate, West London. He devoted his time to Islam by writing, lecturing, preaching and publishing pamphlets. In London he formed an Islamic information bureau and published a journal entitled *Muslim Outlook* (Clark, 1986: 23-39).

The most overriding character of the first converts to Islam is that many of them had worked overseas, in Islamic countries and especially in India, and had been impressed by the faith and conduct of Muslim colleagues. Around this core was a larger population of transient visitors to Britain, often students from Islamic countries (Clark, 1986: 41).

In the period between the two World Wars Islam was identified with these groups of people in Liverpool, Woking, and London. There may have been isolated cases of conversions that are not known. It is also not known what happened to the families and descendants of those people. One should go backwards and find out what happened to them or whether their descendants were brought up as Muslims.

## **2- The Contemporary Native British Muslims**

In contemporary Britain the current number of English converts to Islam is estimated at around 3,000 - 5,000<sup>30</sup> and their number seems to be relatively increasing (McHugh, 1990: 36, Britain 1990: An Official Handbook, H M S O, 231). Any accurate number would be difficult to obtain due to two facts. *First*, being Muslim does not require that one should register officially with a mosque or an organisation although the Islamic Cultural Centre in London issues *conversion*

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<sup>30</sup> This figure was estimated by The Society for British Muslims and Islamic Cultural Centre as well as converts who are involved in this study, see also Nielsen, 1992: 43.

*certificates* on application (see appendix D) *Second*, converts are scattered around the country and they do not live as a community

Converts range from local women who have adopted Islam to a greater or lesser extent of commitment upon marrying a Muslim, to British intellectuals who are highly articulate in expressing their views on a variety of matters (Johnstone, 1981: 181). Most converts came to know Islam through personal contact and it plays a great role in their conversion. Many women get involved with Muslims and they turn to Islam through marrying Arabs and Pakistanis particularly (McHugh, 1990: 36, Ball, 1987: 21). They do not necessarily have to convert for marriage since Islamic law permits Muslim men to marry *Ahl al-Kitāb* (People of the Book). The proportion of men to women seems to be almost equal. A significant number of them are middle-aged people who lived through the hippie generation of the sixties and seventies. Disgusted with Western materialism, they came to Islam in search of spiritual enlightenment and after their conversion some assumed influential positions within the Muslim community. Sardar (1991: 19) explains why some converts gain these positions:

" it has been aided by two factors. *First*, most Muslims in Britain originate from the Indian subcontinent and suffer from a "Raj mentality". They treat a white convert to Islam as an extended family treats a new bride: she is put on a pedestal and admired from a distance. Many white converts have been offered positions of authority. *Second*, the convert leaders are propped up by rich Arabs. Despite the rhetoric of Islamic equality, many Gulf Arabs indulge in a form of racism. They look down on Muslims from the subcontinent and look up to white converts."

British converts believe that Islam is a universal religion and it must be beyond national and ethnic boundaries. In Muslim countries, they think, Islam is mixed with local culture and tradition and they want to practise an Islam that is more Qur'ānic and accords with authentic traditions of the Prophet. To achieve their understanding of Islam some converts attempted to start their own groups/movements. One such convert was 'Abd al-Qādir as-Sufī (Ian Dallas) who became Muslim in 1967. 'Abd al-Qādir started a Sufic movement in the seventies which then used to be called the *Darqāwīyya*, but now it is called the *Murābitūn European Muslim Movement*. He attracted many converts to Islam and made an attempt to start a self-sufficient Muslim village in Britain. Sufism seems to attract many converts to Islam. It is believed to be the major force behind conversion to Islam in Britain (Murghani, 1987: 46). Such a Sufi movement, apart from the *Murābitūn*, in which converts are involved, is that of Shaykh Nazīm, a Turkish Cypriot based in North Cyprus (see chapter VI).

Some converts like Yusuf Islam (formerly pop singer Cat Stevens) are actively engaged in helping the Muslim community and converts. Yusuf Islam arranges a meeting called the *Islamic*

*Circle* every Saturday afternoon in the Islamic Cultural Centre in London. He also opened the Islamia Primary School, which allots 20 percent of its time to religious education and has a fully integrated Islamic curriculum, and lately a secondary school for girls in the London Borough of Brent. Many converts including well-known names such as Martin Lings, Gai Eaton, Ahmad Thomson, Abdul Hakim Winter, Meryl Wyn Davies, Sarah Malik, Ruqayah Khalil and Harfiyah Ball have contributed by writing books, and many others by giving talks on Islam (Mohammad, 1991: 98-9). It is observed that indigenous Muslims are more liberal and dynamic in their interpretation of the role of Islam in Britain than their immigrant fellow Muslims who are more traditionally oriented due to their historical and cultural background.

Indigenous Muslims have also formed other organisations under different names such as the *Islamic Party of Britain* and *Association for British Muslims* which will now be dealt with respectively. While the groups of 'Abd al-Qādir as-Sufi and Shaykh Nazim have the objective of attracting non-Muslims into Islam, these organisations aim to organise Muslims/convert Muslims, or meeting their ends in Britain.

#### **a) The Islamic Party of Britain**

In Britain some Muslims think that to wield some control they have to have political power and they feel there is no political party in Britain that represents their interests (Evans, 1989b: 11). Political consciousness in this way was raised after the Rushdie affair and some Muslims reacted by starting a party called the Islamic party of Britain in September 1989 which was to be the first Islamic party formed in a non-Muslim country. They thought demonstrations and political pressure have been quite ineffective for Muslims in Britain. The main personality for the initiation of the Islamic party was Sahib Mustaqim Bleher, a German convert to Islam, the general secretary of the party, who thought that the time was appropriate for greater political action by Muslims in Britain.<sup>31</sup>

The party claims its membership has reached 8,000 and is aiming for 250,000 in five years. The party's reasons for establishing and its objectives to achieve are as follows:

(a) To lobby for political support among the existing members of councils and parliament on issues which concern Muslims as a whole and on behalf of other members of society regardless of race, colour or creed who are too weak to defend themselves, (b) to establish unity and leadership within the Muslim community and give it a sense of political purpose in order to implement their spiritual and commercial needs, (c) to speak out and defend the rights of Muslims.

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with A. Hankin, the spokesman of the *Islamic party* on Economics, by the author in January 1991.



throughout the world living in non-Muslim environments, (d) to actively confront the media and correct historical inaccuracies and prejudice, (e) to campaign vigorously to provide interest-free banking facilities, enterprise-support and legal indemnification, (f) to present a viable political and social alternative to the British people based on the abiding Islamic principles of justice, benevolence and tolerance, (g) to establish the teaching and the practice of Islam within Britain and Islam's voice within British politics, (h) to establish regular regional and national rallies/seminars to call people to Islam and participation in action through support or membership<sup>32</sup>

According to the party's spokesman on economy, A Hankin, who is an English convert to Islam, one of the aims of the party was to make other parties feel that there is this alternative Islamic party if they do not take the view of Muslims

"We didn't expect to be swept to power in the next general election. We didn't even expect to have an MP or any kind of representative. The main impact or the main benefit we had from it is the fact of the formation of the party has forced the other political parties to take the views of the Muslims much more seriously because there is now always that alternative in the background. If the Muslims view that their rights are being walked over or they are not being listened to, then there is always this alternative of Islamic party. Both the Labour party and Conservatives know this. And perhaps the second major reason for the establishment of the party was in terms of da'wah. Being a political party we will automatically get a certain degree of press coverage. When reporting Islamic party policies I always report Islamic teachings. And this allows many people who otherwise would never have a chance to have any idea what Islam is saying to learn a few things about Islam. And this already has had quite a significant effect on many people."<sup>33</sup>

Before the general election of 9 April 1992 the party took part in several local elections where many Muslims are resident such as Bradford where it came fourth after the three big parties, but failed to attract a substantial number of Muslim votes.<sup>34</sup> The general election of 9 April 1992 also brought a failure for the party. For example, in Bradford West where the president of the party, Daoud Pidcock, was a candidate it was able to get only one percent of the votes.<sup>35</sup>

The executive body of the party mainly consists of converts to Islam. The president Daoud Pidcock, the general secretary S. Mustaqim Bleher, transport and education spokesman Abdurrahim Green, spokesman on economics Abd as-Salam Hankin are all converts to Islam. Since the party is mainly run by converts it is criticised by some Muslims and leaders of the Muslim community are deeply divided about the launch of the party. Zaki Badawi, chair of the *Council of*

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<sup>32</sup> Leaflet distributed by the Islamic Party of Britain, *The Way Ahead*. Islamic Party of Britain, nd

<sup>33</sup> See footnote 31

<sup>34</sup> "Islamic Party Loses its Deposit", *The Muslim News*, 23 November 1990

<sup>35</sup> *The Independent*/Election 1992 results, 10 April 1992, p. 10

*Imāms and Mosques* commented "It is the converts who are taking the lead in all this. Few have no roots in the community."<sup>36</sup>

In an article on a national paper over the leadership problem of British Muslims Sardar (1991: 19) has severely criticised the position of converts in the party:

"In following the *Sunnah* example of Muhammad, the converts came to see themselves as personifying the Prophet, only they could interpret Islam for other Muslims. So they sought to impose their often authoritarian version of Islam and the *Sunnah*. In this respect, no one should be surprised that white converts have a disproportionate influence within the Islamic party of Britain."

It is also proposed that the convert leadership would not understand the real problems of Asians like racism. However, the spokesman A. Hankin explains why the party had to be set up by converts:

"The reality of the Muslim organisations in this country is that they are really disjointed. There is a lot of competition, there is a lot of petty personal rivalries between different organisations. And to try and bring them together was really a hopeless task from the beginning. So it might be a benefit that in the party there are converts because they do not have any allegiance to any ethnic or racial group. Converts are fairly neutral in this."<sup>37</sup>

The headquarters of the party was in Birmingham but it has now been moved to Milton Keynes. The party is trying to set up branches in areas where there is a significant number of Muslim population. The executive body of the party believes that it would probably be a number of years before the party can have a solid significant impact on British politics by having votes from the Muslim community.

#### **b) The Association for British Muslims**

Since none of the existing organisations air the problems of converts and none has a programme especially for them, some converts decided to establish an organisation called the *Association for British Muslims* which was set up in London in 1974. It is a continuation of William Quilliam's organisation in Liverpool and the one that functioned in Notting Hill Gate, West London, during the 1920s and 1930. The objectives of the association are to represent the interests of all Muslim converts and to project a better understanding of Islam in Britain. Although the association mainly aims to help converts to adjust to being Muslim Britons, it also aims at the descendants of immigrants to adjust equally to being British Muslims.

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<sup>36</sup> "Muslims Divided About the Party", *New Horizon*, November 1989, p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> See footnote 31.

According to the president of the association they do not see any contradiction between British traditions and Islam. He states that the association represents the majority of converts, and a typical profile is middle class, professional, often public school educated, monarchist, conservative, and involved with genuine mystic paths and masters (Owen, 1991: 14).

The association has had a lot of criticism, not least from other converts on the basis that there is no racial grouping in Islam and so they can not split off. The president, Daoud Owen, answers the criticisms by accusing other Muslim organisations of not being able to understand converts and the British mentality.

"The problem has been that a lot of the organisations in Britain don't address the specific needs of converts who have particular problems. And also they don't understand the British culture. Some of the organisations were set up to bring Islam to British people but none of them has actually understood the British culture, the British mind. It was all very well belonging to these organisations but nobody was helping somebody who had converted come to terms with the social consequences of it. And very simple practical things of how to help somebody, say, stop drinking, stop eating pork, and why these things are necessary. As a result there are a lot of converts who are not getting the aftercare that they need."<sup>38</sup>

The president also accuses Muslims who discourage converts to join the association.

"People are talking to converts saying 'You can't join them because we are Muslim and all Muslims are brothers, and there is no nation in Islam.' This is foolish. Why is it all right to have say a Sri Lankan or a Pakistani Muslim association but not to have a British Muslim association?"<sup>39</sup>

To conclude then, although some converts seem to be taking the lead on many occasions and in organisational matters, they, however, are not as publicly active as pre-War period converts who had exclusively taken the matters of the Muslim community in their hands (see Murghani, 1987: 46). The reasons for this change are two-fold. *First*, before the War, the number of Muslims were very small. With the influx of immigration in the 1950s and 1960s the philosophical and political ideas of Muslim thinkers from the home countries of immigrants were brought in. *Second*, Muslims brought in their religious leaders with them as well as community leaders. This situation led to immigrants having less consultation with converts over the matters of the Muslim community.

Now the da'wah activities of Muslims in Britain and their strategy in the West in general will be examined.

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Daoud Rosser-Owen, the president of the *Association for British Muslims*, by the author in January 1991.

<sup>39</sup> See footnote 38.

## **C: DA'WAH STRATEGY IN BRITAIN**

In this section the different understanding or interpretation of da'wah activity and the degree of involvement among Muslims in Britain will be examined. Again our sources are bound not to go beyond the writings of Muslim scholars, like Khurram Murad, on da'wah, and indirect printed materials by a small number of Muslims.

In terms of missionary activities (da'wah), Muslims in Britain have been unenthusiastic even though da'wah (mission, spreading the message of Islam) is given high priority in the stated objectives of many organisations. However, the majority of Muslims living in Britain believe that the emergence of a distinctive Muslim identity is essential for effective da'wah and this can be achieved through the example of moral and material excellence set by Muslim individuals and families. According to them the stability of Muslim family life, the absence of drinks, drugs, etc., and the overall discipline of Muslims living in the West will itself send powerful signals to non-Muslims. In his address to British Muslims during the annual conference of the UK Islamic Mission in 1985, Faruqi (1986a: 7, 19) spelt out that the family is the "best tool" for Islamic da'wah in the West to present the value of Islam, and urged Muslims to make it a rule to invite a non-Muslim to visit their family once a week.

The Muslim who wishes to perform da'wah activity in Britain faces a complex situation. He is, on the one hand, commanded by the Qur'ān (16: 125) to *"Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching"*. On the other hand, he finds himself in a non-Muslim land where his religion is not recognised by the state. So the activist Muslim in such a position has two options. He may choose to abandon his mission, or he may choose the way of calling individuals to Islam if he wishes to fulfil his Qur'ānic responsibility. For those activists who choose the latter way there seems to be two main strategies. There are those who favour an indirect da'wah approach and those who prefer direct missionary work.

### **1- Indirect Da'wah Approach**

Most Muslims believe that living a Muslim life-style is sufficient to attract others to the religion as they observe pious Muslims. To use a Christian concept this approach may be called "life-style evangelism". According to those who advocate this type of missionary activity, God has not given power to man to convert anybody to his way of thinking. Hence, a Muslim worker should not worry himself whether other people will accept or reject his message (Islahi, 1978: 151). Instead they ought to behave as Muslims. They believe that "action speaks louder than words".

and criticise direct da'wah activists for utilising the agency of the word of mouth as the only means of propagation of the faith and avoiding the importance of demonstrating practically Mawdūdī (1967: 31), who is the founder of Jamā'at-i Islāmī and has a significant following in Britain, advocates indirect da'wah strategy, though he does not exclude direct da'wah, to Muslims living in Britain and invites them to be ambassadors of Islam. By doing so, he says, they will manage to invoke an interest on the part of non-Muslims

One characteristic of indirect da'wah proponents is that if they, by chance, engage in conversation with non-Muslims, they prefer to point out common grounds that Islam shares with other religions rather than claiming that Islam is superior to others. Life-style proponents are more likely to be introversionist in the sense that they are concerned primarily with the maintenance of their religion than conveying the message of Islam to non-Muslims. The first generation of immigrants are to be classified into this group because they were more concerned with obtaining a comfortable standard of living in Britain. Having migrated to a non-Muslim country and having faced ensuing uncertainty they have tended to be defensive and passivist. This passivist attitude may have led Muslims to be isolationists and have less interaction with non-Muslims.

## **2- Direct Da'wah Approach**

Some Muslims find life-style da'wah strategy insufficient although they regard it as supportive of one's mission. They label it as being too passive. They think that in a pluralistic society the Muslim life-style will not even be noticed by non-Muslims (Yakan, 1984: 111). Instead they advocate that to bring non-Muslims into the fold of Islam a Muslim should inform a non-Muslim of the specific precepts of the Islamic faith in the hope that it will evoke a decision on the part of the non-Muslim to either accept Islam or to deliberately refuse (Islahi, 1978: 89).

Direct da'wah proponents are more extrovertly oriented and they are more activist and offensive as opposed to introvert, defensive-passivist indirect da'wah proponents. The new generation of Muslims, who consider Britain their home in contrast to their parents, are more likely to fall into this category. They believe that if Islam is presented to British society, many people will not find difficulty in accepting it because Islam offers alternatives to British society (western societies in general) which has a high crime rate, drug problems, etc.

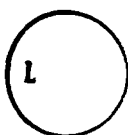
Direct da'wah strategists suggest a procedure to be followed in carrying out the da'wah activity. *Firstly*, it must, they believe, be universally applicable to Islamic propagators all over the world. A beautiful language and an elegant form are its prerequisites (al-Fasi, 1967: 3). *Secondly*, the caller should not think to reach the largest number of people. He should start from his closest

friends, and immediate surrounding *Thirdly*, the caller should present his argument in many ways, and be replete with emotion and zeal *Finally*, the propagators should never be obstinate or antagonistic and should always have regard for the feeling of listeners (Islahi, 1978 89) They do not encourage Muslim propagators to carry out door to door visits of the kind associated with Jehovah's Witnesses but they are advised "to develop friendship and win the trust of any individual who shows inclination towards Islam and then engage in serious dialogue" instead

The most important qualification for Muslim activists, according to some strategists is that they must be armed with knowledge and modern learning as well as a full mastery of the techniques of modern propaganda Effective missionary work requires a full-knowledge of Islamic teachings and their sources, plus competence in at least some of the main academic disciplines of today (al-Fasi, 1967 3-4) Mawdūdī (1967 31) urges Muslims in Britain to have a body of bright and studious young Muslims who should prepare themselves for highly scientific pursuits and they should be able to suggest reasonable solutions, according to Islamic concepts and theories, of all problems that crop up in present day life Otherwise, Mawdūdī suggests, nothing will be accepted by English people since they have reached a high standard of development in philosophy and physical and social sciences Some strategists also favour utilising proper communication techniques in order to facilitate da'wah activity They are aware of the fact that much could be learnt from Christian missionary methodology such as distribution of literature in various languages and establishing of Islamic broadcasting stations (Sicard, 1976 354)

Along this line of precepts of direct da'wah methodology in Britain, facilities such as seminars, lectures and the like are arranged in mosques, schools and Islamic organisations to draw different kinds of people On these occasions Muslims have the chance of engaging in conversation with non-Muslims during refreshments which are often made available following such gatherings Islamic societies in universities make use of this type of gathering more successfully than any other kind of organisation

Since there is no institution in Britain and throughout the Muslim world similar to Christian missionary institutions, to arrange missionary work, the Muslim missionary relies on printed work more than anything else Apart from the organisations' own publishing there are several publishing houses that print books adapted to da'wah objectives Some of the literature consists of booklets, some full-length books, and magazines which are more applicable to those who are interested in Islam Many books and magazines discuss Christian-Muslim relations and target Christian audiences attempting to bridge the gap between the two faiths Emphasis has always been made about Jesus being a prophet of Islam as well as Islam being an Abrahamic religion



Free copies of the Qur'ān with English translation are also made available to non-Muslims by several organisations

Some converts involved in this study expressed their opinions as to whether Muslims should take a more proselytising approach to da'wah. Most of them believe that if Islam is made known to British people objectively, there will be more converts. One convert remarked rather eagerly "I can't imagine any one reason why anybody should reject Islam if they really understand what Islam is all about. It is something perfectly reasonable and rational." Another interviewee had a slightly different view

"I think there is always this fear in most people that you are trying to con them and things like that as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons coming to the door. They think you are just another one of them. And so this is why I'm taking a softly, softly approach. But I think nevertheless you do have to make an effort to let them learn something about Islam at any possible time."

Psychologically the indirect da'wah view is certainly a more comfortable means of propagating since there is little chance of confrontation with a targeted individual. On the other hand, indirect missionary activity may create a situation in which a Muslim is religiously devout and socially emphatic in his surrounding and may be admired and appreciated as simply "a good neighbour" without inquiry as to the causes of the observed devotion and empathy or non-Muslims may attribute it to the fact that they are products of foreign culture (see Poston, 1988: 280). So direct da'wah activists are of the opinion that some intellectual interaction must inevitably occur since non-Muslims also need to be aware of the doctrines of Islam to commit to it, whereas indirect da'wah activists are of the opinion "get hold of the heart and the head yields easily."

In general the Muslims of Britain are often criticised for not finding a proper da'wah methodology and for their failure to contextualise Islam for the Western audience. Khurram Murad for the first time specified da'wah strategy for Muslims living in Britain/the West. Murad is involved in the Jamā'at-i Islāmī movement in Pakistan and he was a disciple of Mawdūdī. He came to Britain to succeed Khurshid Ahmad, the founder of the Islamic Foundation in Leicester, in 1978. He remained in this position until 1986 when he had to go back to Pakistan due to health reasons. During his stay in Britain he has served as an inspirational force for Islamic workers in the West. His booklets and speeches are considered as textbooks for Islamic workers in Britain and elsewhere (Abdullah, 1986b: 63). His experience in Britain enabled him to understand the special problems connected with the establishment of an Islamic movement and da'wah in a non-Muslim context and he collected his views in two main works entitled *Da'wah Among Non-Muslims in the West* and *Islamic Movement in the West*. For Murad da'wah among non-Muslims cannot, and should not, be treated as an isolated phenomenon. Muslims should recognise its proper place at the centre of Islamic life that they must live. In his view, da'wah in Islam is not a profession. It is a state

of mind, a world view, an attitude to life, thus it is integral to Islam. There are elements of both the direct and indirect da'wah approach in Murad's thinking. He sees both types of approaches as complementing one another. Having stated the central place of da'wah in Islam, Murad tries to determine the concepts and methodologies and points to three basic concepts which, in his view, provide the essential framework for the important attitudes and approaches that Muslims should follow concerning da'wah. *Firstly*, Islam is not a new religion, it is the eternal message of God. The basic message of Islam, that was given to the first Prophet, was the same as that given to the Last Prophet. So coming to Islam is like going back to one's own roots - in nature and in history. *Secondly*, the *Muslim Ummah* has not been constituted to become just another nation among nations, Islam has been raised for all mankind. *Thirdly*, the objective of da'wah is not to win an argument, it is to win and activate a heart (Murad, 1986: 16-7).

Little has been said and written on Muslim missionary activity in Britain apart from Murad's effort to form a strategy in order to pursue a methodology of da'wah. And not many organisations give priority to missionary work. Those which give priority to missionary work are admittedly inadequate in developing a mission work or programme. In the light of the above stated facts it may be concluded that Muslim missionary work in Britain has not been entirely successful. There are many reasons for this failure which one can easily detect upon observing the Muslim community and listening to British converts to Islam. Some of the significant reasons, as Mohammad (1991: 99, 103) outlines can be counted as follows: (a) The Muslims in Britain have had a low self image for they had neither an Islamic state to look up to around the world nor any significant achievements in Britain, (b) most Muslims have not accepted a universal perspective on Islam in practice and cannot step out of their cultural boundaries to accept Muslims from other cultures, (c) they are ignorant of the basic values of English people and the fundamentals of Christian theology, (d) they are engrossed in petty disputes and do not project a clear-cut world view and perspective of Islam, (e) they have failed to evolve a language for da'wah or an appropriate strategy of communication which could appeal to the people in Britain, (f) Muslim youth who interact with non-Muslims learn religion from their elders who try to convince only the convinced. So they do not know how to present their religion to non-Muslims.

Taken together the above mentioned facts with the fact that Muslims in Britain are viewed as "ex-colonials" who have received the additional favour of being allowed to settle in mainland Britain, the future of conversion to Islam in Britain does not seem to be promising. Yet the present number of native British converts around 3,000 - 5,000 may be treated as significant though it is not as significant as in some European countries.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> There are around 30,000-50,000 French converts to Islam in France. There are over 5,000 German converts in Germany. There are around 5,000 Dutch converts in Netherlands. See Nielsen, 1992: 11, 26, 61.



This study is concerned only with the different understandings or interpretations of da'wah activity and the degree of involvement among Muslims in Britain. The history, description and discussion of da'wah in Islam in general can be found in the following sources

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**CHAPTER THREE**

**ON THE WAY TO CONVERSION**

**(Childhood and Adolescence Experiences)**

## **A: CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES**

In this chapter the reported childhood experiences of those interviewed will be described. The characteristics of the group interviewed will be compared with those of other groups whose conversion biographies have been similarly studied.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the literature on conversion suggest that conversion is not only and not always sudden, and one should look at the developing person throughout his/her whole lifespan, also taking into consideration psycho-social factors. In this way the claim that the conversion as part of a lifelong search for ultimate meaning can be examined.<sup>2</sup> Thus the structure of the interview was organised to examine the whole lifespan of the converts, beginning with childhood and adolescence experiences.

### **1) Happiness versus Unhappiness**

It has long been established that the family is principal among the social relationships that contribute to religious growth (Meadow and Kahoe, 1984: 37). Christensen (1963: 210) found evidence that distorted interfamilial relationships unconsciously affect the development of religious experience. Studies of converts to NRMs generally indicate that they have a special appeal to disorganised, disturbed youth alienated from their family of origin. Deutsch (1975: 166), for example, studied 14 members of the New York-based Meher Baba cult and described virtually all gave histories of "chronic unhappiness and unsatisfactory parental relations". He found that all but a few of the parental marriages were described as unhappy. Ullman (1989: 11-16, 1982: 189), studying 40 converts from various groups, born-again Christians, the repentant Jews, the Hare Krishna devotees, and the Bahai converts, with a control group of 30 nonconverts, found that converts characterised their childhood as unhappy more often than nonconverts ( $\chi^2 = 22.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ). About one-half of converts (47.5%) in Ullman's sample were judged as describing an extremely unhappy childhood while only 6 (15%) were judged as describing a normal or happy childhood. They reported specific, disturbing, traumatic events experiencing early parental divorce or death, or witnessing a parent attempt suicide, violent fights, or recurrent mental breakdowns of parents. None of the Hare Krishna devotees characterised their childhood as happy. Frequencies of "happy" childhood varied from 10 percent to 40 percent in the other groups, but the differences among the four groups were not significant (Ullman, 1988: 316).

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<sup>1</sup> Recruitment or sampling methods in other studies to which comparisons were made can be seen in Appendix F.

<sup>2</sup> Scholars who take this perspective on conversion include Sanctis, 1927, Fowler, 1981, Gillespie, 1991.

To examine these issues the interview questions aimed at disclosing converts' emotional well-being during childhood, and adolescence. They referred to the person's perception of both parents, and relationships with them as well as to specific traumatic events during childhood and adolescence.

In general the subjects interviewed in the present study drew a normal or happy (but rarely very happy) picture of their childhood although there were extreme cases which were described as "horrible". 31 (44%) reported a "happy" childhood, 18 (26%) described it as "moderate". Only 21 (30%) reported an unhappy childhood. As for traumatic events in childhood or early adolescence, 11 (16%) of those interviewed stated that their parents were divorced (one woman was adopted never knowing who her true parents were), 3 (4%) said their parents were on the verge of break-up, 9 (13%) had at least one parent who died before they were 16 years of age. Parental divorce seems to have been the major trauma (16%) of childhood.

Religious converts in Ullman's (1989: 11) sample also reported specific disturbing, traumatic events during their childhood. About one-third of the converts in Ullman's sample had experienced early divorce or early parental death. Another third described such gross traumatic incidences as witnessing a parent attempt suicide, violent fights at home, etc.

When describing how they perceived their relationships with their fathers in childhood (see table 3.1), 21 of the present sample reported bad relations while 4 had no relation whatsoever with their father. It was an average relationship for 25, while it was good or very good for 20. As for relations with the mother 11 reported bad relations. It was average for 28, and it was good or very good for 31. 19 reported separations of over 1 year from either parent in childhood (separation covered father being away, death, divorce, etc.).

The father problem appeared with similar frequency in men and women (see table 3.2). 40 percent of women as against 34 percent of men reported bad relations with their fathers. As for the mother problem it also appeared with similar frequency in men and women. 20 percent of women reported bad relations as against 14 percent of men. The data analysis found no significant association between relationships with parents and gender of converts.

Table 3.1 Perception of relations with parents in childhood

	relation with father (n=70)	relation with mother (n=70)
no relation	4 (5.7%)	0 (0%)
bad	21 (30%)	11 (15.7%)
average	25 (35.7%)	28 (40%)
good/very good	20 (28.6%)	31 (44.3%)

Table 3 2 Bad relationships with parents in childhood among males and females

	bad relation with father	bad relation with mother
Women (n=20)	8 (40%)	4 (20%)
Men (n=50)	17 (34%)	7 (14%)

## 2- Father Figure in Childhood: Absent or Withdrawn Father

Some studies on religious conversion from the psychoanalytic perspective hypothesised that the religious conversion experience may serve to supply a benevolent, protective, strong and firm paternal figure to replace a father who was seen as deficient in these respects Allison (1969 23, 31) studying male divinity school students who experienced conversion (7 intense, 7 weak religious conversion, and 6 no conversion cases) found that four out of seven subjects who reported a dramatic religious experience had fathers who were "either adulterers, alcoholics or committed suicide" None of Allison's other subjects, who experienced weak or no conversion, had fathers falling into one of the above categories Allison concluded that the conversion experience serves to alter a perception of the actual father as weak, ineffective, or absent by supplying instead an internal representation of a strong and principled substitute paternal figure with clear values and firm judgements Salzman (1953 186), suggesting a distinction between "progressive" (adaptive) and "regressive" conversions, traced back to a hated father figure The majority of Deutsch's (1975 168), sample described their fathers as hostile and critical Deutsch also found that at least four of the 14 converts' fathers were absent. Similarly, in Ullman's study the importance of father figure stood out in interviews with 40 converts Almost 80 percent of Ullman's sample were judged as experiencing an extremely stressful relationship with their fathers as against only 23 percent of the control group of 30 religiously affiliated nonconverts The sample also showed that the converts' fathers emerged from their children's childhood memories as either having been absent and extremely passive - and therefore psychologically unavailable - or actively rejecting About one-third of them had had very little or no contact with their biological fathers since the ages of four/five 45 percent had fathers whom they perceived as weak, withdrawn, or hostile Only 18 percent were judged as describing a positive relationship with their fathers (Ullman, 1989 30)

The present sample provides limited support of a problem regarding relationship with the father as the above studies speculated As presented earlier only less than one third of the converts reported bad or stressful relations with their father Their childhood or adolescent experiences in terms of absent, withdrawn, or normal fathering were also examined 18 reported

father absence, while 25 described their father as withdrawn 27 reported normal fathering<sup>3</sup> (see table 3 3)

Table 3 3 Fathering in Childhood and adolescence (n=70)

Father absent	18 (26%)
Father withdrawn	25 (36%)
Normal fathering	27 (38%)

Father absence (26%) in most cases were caused by divorce However, death and being away from home for occupational reasons were also among the reasons 4 converts had little or no contact with their fathers This seems merely to have accentuated the estrangement between them since childhood Raymond has no knowledge of his father's personality, background or occupation "I don't know anything about my father I think he is somewhere in London It doesn't really bother me He is not really my father anyway, is he? He has only slept with my mother Father is someone who brings you up " Tony, too, has no recollection of his father "My parents didn't get married I have no contact with my father, he had left my mother when I was very little "

28 2 percent of Ullman's (1989 31) sample described their father as absent, while 20 5 percent reported a passive or withdrawn father Passive and withdrawn fathers are more frequent (36%) than father absence (26%) in the childhood memories of the converts interviewed They are remembered by their sons and daughters as distant and ineffectual, too withdrawn to offer guidance and support Debbie, a 20 year old college student, portrayed her father as punishing "My relations with my father was very poor The only contact I had with him was that of a father punishing his daughter Never ever have we had a private conversation With my mother it has never been deep either "

Taken together 62 percent reported either absent or withdrawn father as against 38 percent who reported normal fathering This finding with the majority having a history of seemingly nonexistent or turbulent relationships raises the question of "How is the want of fathering implicated in the actual conversion process? What is the chain of events through which ineffectual fathering may participate in bringing about a dramatic change of heart?" The lack of paternal protection may exacerbate the child's perception of reality outside the home as sinister and unreliable Evidently many of those who did not receive adequate fathering regarded society as unreliable and some had rebellious feelings when they reached adolescence The cases of

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<sup>3</sup> "Absent" covers deficient and absent fathers, "withdrawn" includes psychologically absent, hostile/aggressive, unstable, withdrawn, weak/ineffective fathering, "normal" covers overprotective, neutral, and positive See Ullman, 1989 204

Janet, Jimmy, Raymond, Steve, and Tony that will be presented in the following pages gives examples of the importance of fathering. In their eyes the world out there is populated with hypocrites, vicious competitors and manipulators. They believe that conversion gave them the chance to leave this sinister world. As Ullman (1989: 54-5) puts it the father may serve as a mediator between the family and the outside world and aids in securing the child's perception of reality outside the home as safe and malleable rather than sinister and manipulating. A father who is absent, or ineffectual and withdrawn, or harsh and rejecting leaves the child wanting in these consequential aspects of socialisation, including a search for structure and protection. Religious conversion may be an expression of an attempted solution for these consequences of inadequate fathering. Religion, however, provides imperative guidelines for behaviour, inhibiting impulses and producing structure and stability.

However, these findings do not necessarily suggest that all who have absent or withdrawn fathers will be religious converts. It may only suggest that difficulties in relating to the father may only be one of the antecedents of religious conversion among many. Besides, some converts like Pam also tended to express anger towards their mothers. "I have always had a very good relationship with my father, but I had a difficult and rocky relationship with my mother. The conclusion that difficult relationship with the father may be an antecedent of conversion, applies, of course, to the sample studied and may not apply to all converts to Islam.

### **3- Mother: Father's Substitute and Independence from Her**

When the father is absent or withdrawn the chances of an overdependence on the mother may increase. Allison's (1969: 31) research suggested that the father's actual absence or unavailability or perception of him as weak or immoral is associated with a special closeness between the subjects and their mothers. Allison found that even in the case of the subjects whose fathers were less obviously absent or inadequate, there is a suggestion that the subjects felt particularly close to their mothers and relatively remote from their fathers during much of their lives. Ullman (1989: 56), without giving the percentage, also wrote that converts whose father were absent or withdrawn tended to report positive and close relationships with their mothers. This pattern of relations with the mother naturally occurs with some (7%) of the converts interviewed, since many experienced early parental divorce and almost all continued to stay with their mothers, which eventually led to estrangement from the father. In these cases the mother often emerges as supportive, understanding, and warmer than the father. It seems likely that the lack of paternal guidance or support had enforced, in these cases, a reliance on the mother as the only source of security and had intensified the intimate bond with her. However some still

described their mother as good-natured and warm-hearted but also found them ignorant and inadequate. Raymond, a 22 year old college student, does not even know his father's whereabouts. He has lived with his mother all his life. Though he has always been dependent on his mother he saw her as inadequate. His mother was a drug-user and she did not even send Raymond to school and he was not able to even write his name until 13 years of age. He hated his mother as well as his father. When he started to talk about his mother he said he did not like to say she was his mother and blamed her for not giving him a normal upbringing and for being an "agnostic" and trying to indoctrinate him with that. Raymond converted when 18 which is well below the average conversion age (29.7) for the present sample. Merging with his mother due to lack of paternal guidance seems to have precipitated his conversion process but he also wanted to separate himself from his mother.

Some of the existing literature on conversion (based largely on case-studies and small samples of convenience) in adolescence suggest that the adolescent moves via conversion towards independence from his mother. When the father is absent or withdrawn and the mother is the only source of security the process of separation and the individuation becomes at once more urgent and more arduous. Overdependence on the mother may blur the boundaries of the relationship with her. Allison (1969: 24, 36) claimed that the conversion experience provides a substitute father, and it may also provide "a protector against the regressive nostalgia for the undifferentiated union with the mother and serves thereby in aiding the process of individuation and differentiation." Levin and Zegans (1974: 75) also showed that with a weak-father figure as an object for identification the adolescent may not develop a firm sexual identity and therefore he can not establish for himself a 'self' truly separate from his mother. Ullman (1989: 57) suggested that through the conversion, the convert finds not only an inhibitor and protector to replace a father who is deficient in these respects but also a shield from the seductive unity with the mother. Thus the conversion experience helps consolidate the converts' previously shaky sense of identity.

A few converts who had their father absent in childhood recounted that they wanted to be independent of their mothers. As quoted above Raymond had a strong need to separate from his mother. Freddie had a similar experience.

"After I was about seven my parents divorced and we were put into care for a short while although later on I grew up with my mother. This was very traumatic for me. And my relationship with her, apart from the first few years, was very difficult although I took my mother's side and came to dislike my father."

John also had a difficult relationship with his mother when he was an adolescent.



"I went through quite a traumatic stage from the age of about 11 to 15 In that my mother separated from my father I was given the choice of whether to live with my mother or stay with my father As I felt closer to my mother I went to live with her She developed an alcohol problem And so my relationship with her distanced It became increasingly hard to communicate with her "

This pattern of differentiation from the mother is sometimes present in the sample studied Yet they are rare cases The hypothesis that through conversion those who have a weak father figure may gain individuation from the mother does not seem to be a crucial factor in the conversion experiences of those interviewed Freddie and John converted in their mid-twenties, and Raymond converted when 18 However, the interviews suggest that the need to break maternal bonds may have been something of a precipitating factor for conversion

#### **4- Parents' Affiliation and Upbringing Regarding Religion**

The most powerful social background predictor of a person's religious involvement appears to be the religious involvement of his parents The likelihood of adopting parental religion has been found to be higher if religion is important for the parents, if both parents share the same religious beliefs, and if the child identifies with the parents The child then experiences strong social pressure to conform to their wishes with regard to religion (Batson and Ventis, 1982 46)

The converts involved in this research seem to have come from families where there was no strong identification with any religion They mostly (85%) come from families that did not belong to a church, or were not active participants in a church Most of the interviewees gave the following or a similar account about their parents "My parents are not church-goers, but basically just believers "

Most described their parents' connection with the church in terms of ceremonial attendance like weddings and funerals At home the religious commitment has not made itself explicit in the outer forms of conventional Christianity, in terms of church going and the other observances

When classified according to religion of upbringing the present sample consists of 51 Church of England, 12 Catholics, 3 Methodists, and 4 Jews (see table 4 1) Significantly, 17 (24 3%) had parents religiously heterogeneous such as the mother being Church of England and the father Agnostic, or the mother being Catholic and the father Church of England Three converts had one parent who converted to their partner's religion or denomination And five described one parent as being atheist or agnostic Pam described her religiously heterogeneous parents

"My mother is Christian, but not practising, she doesn't go to church. My father is a communist, and recently he became a socialist, but he still doesn't believe in God. There was no religion at home at all. When I saw our neighbours go to church I used to ask my mother why we didn't, and my mother used to say she couldn't agree on it. When I went to state school it was fashionable to teach religion, but I didn't take religious education."

Although there is not much research specifically investigating the childhood experiences of converts to new religious movements in terms of their religious upbringing, some research has revealed that converts did not have a strong religious upbringing. Deutsch (1975: 168), for example, found that none of his subjects had a strong religious upbringing.

36 (51.4%) described that they had "no" or "weak" religious upbringing. 20 (28.6%) answered "normal" while only 14 (20%) described it as "strong". Kevin, who had no religious atmosphere at home at all, described what it was like:

"My parents belonged to the Church of England nominally. They were not religious and religion was never discussed at home. I think my mother had religious inclinations. She sometimes went to church, but it was a social thing. I remember my mother talked about the afterlife and she just said "no one has ever come back to tell about it." My father, I never ever recall him showing any interest or mentioning it. He just had no recognition in any kind of religious outlook at all, he has been totally indifferent to it."

David received discouragement from his parents about belief:

"In the family I didn't really have any religious upbringing. In fact, I was discouraged from believing in religion, not very actively, but just kind of in the background because people see religion as something backward or superstitious or don't see any reason to believe in it."

Although relative religiosity of the parents was not specifically examined, interviews revealed that converts described their mothers as more religious than their fathers, and they learnt their religion through their mothers rather than their fathers. This, in fact, is in congruence with the finding that Christian women are more religious than Christian men (Argyle and Bert-Hallahmi, 1975: 71).

## **5- Freud and Religious Conversion**

Freud's interpretation of religious experience places the father in the centre. He maintains that humans endow God with features that they have attributed to their own fathers in childhood. He claimed that a human's relationship to God is always modelled after his relationship with his biological father, fluctuating and changing with it. The psychoanalytic view which Freud developed suggests that one source of the need for religious beliefs lies in children's inevitable disappointments in their parents. Children get disappointed with parents whom they have perceived as omnipotent and unconditionally protective. According to the psychoanalytic view, children transfer these perceptions and expectations to a new superior figure and the child's wish

for utter protection by an invincible power lives on in the religious beliefs of the adult. Freud claims that a second source of the need for religious beliefs lies in the Oedipal situation. Religious beliefs and the rituals which accompany them may be viewed as an expression of the body's efforts to atone for his guilt over his desire to displace his actual father.<sup>4</sup> Freud's interpretation of a case of religious conversion that will be dealt with below is a logical extension of his ideas by which he depicted religious belief as a fantasy wish fulfilment, as an illusion which distorts the reality of the human condition. He argued that the belief in an omnipotent God provides people with an illusory father, sparing them the recognition of their own helplessness (Freud, 1978).

Freud's only article (1961) dealing directly with the experience of religious conversion is his response to a letter he received from a young American physician who protested psychoanalysis' disparaging views of religion, criticised Freud, and described his own conversion experience that he had in the year he graduated at the University. Before his experience, the physician admits, the doctrines of Christianity had been the subject of doubts in his mind. One afternoon while passing through the dissecting room the physician had seen the corpse of a "sweet-faced dear old woman" being carried onto the dissecting table and was bothered by the thought that "There is no God. If there were a God, he would not have allowed this dear old woman to be brought into the dissecting room." When he got home he had decided to stop going to church. While meditating on this matter, a voice spoke warning him that he should consider the step he was about to take. In the course of the next few days unsettling religious doubts followed and culminated in a religious experience in which the physician accepted Christianity again.

In dealing with this conversion experience Freud, first of all, deals with the matter of "how come an omnipotent God allows such a terrible thing as the physician thinks?" He purports that the physician's experience is based on bad logic and his interpretation is based on emotional motives. God, as we know, Freud says, allows horrors to take place of a kind very different from the removal of a dead body of a pleasant-looking old woman to a dissecting room. Then Freud asks the question "why was it, then, that the physician's indignation against God broke out precisely when he received this particular impression in the dissecting room?" Freud believes that the dead woman's face had reminded the physician of his own mother and gives the evidence of the physician's affectionately phrased description of the "sweet-faced dear old woman." The significance of the episode at the morgue, in Freud's view, lies in its symbolic tie to the Oedipal situation in which the male child perceives his father as a threatening rival for the mother's love. The physician's undue indignation, according to Freud, is the remnant of this archaic competition.

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<sup>4</sup> For further discussion see Ullman, 1989 46-47

with the father. The sight of a "sweet old woman" aroused in the young physician a longing for his own mother. Freud suggested that this longing was derived from the Oedipus complex, and that this was immediately completed by a feeling of indignation and anger against his father. It stirred the complementing emotion of anger towards his father for "taking her away" and a wish to dispose of him as a rival. The physician's idea of "God" and "father" were not widely separated unconsciously, so his desire to destroy his father manifested itself unconsciously as doubt in the existence of God and sought "to justify itself in the eyes of reason as indignation about the ill-treatment of a mother-object" (Freud, 1961: 171). Freud believed that insofar as these religious sentiments are conscious manifestations of a reactivated Oedipal wish to "save" the mother from the father's possession, they are anxiety-laden and cannot persist. The intense anxiety stems from the young man's childish fears that his father will retaliate. This anxiety is manifested in the inner voices uttering warnings against resistance to God. In childhood, the original Oedipal struggle is resolved for the male child by a complete submission to the will of the father. The new impulse, which is displaced into the sphere of religion by religious doubts, is only a repetition of the Oedipus situation and consequently soon met with a similar fate. The doubts are quelled by inner voices warning against resistance to God, and the young man feels compelled to accept the religious teachings of his childhood and submit to the Will of God. So Freud describes the conversion experience as a defensive process used to reduce anxiety. In this process an all-out surrender to an illusory father figure replaces and distorts the real but unconscious anger towards the natural father. The doubts and ensuing change of heart are epiphenomenon, by-products of archaic needs. The religious conversion is an attempt to control anxiety over childhood conflicts between reactivated Oedipal rage towards the father and the fear of his retaliation that is stirred again prior to conversion. In short, Freud theorised that because the man's understanding of God and father was basically interrelated, the anger and rebellion that were experienced were expressed in atheistic form. But for fear of the omnipotence of God he was forced to a sudden return to faith, which was experienced at a moment called conversion.

Freud's hypothesis has found considerable acceptance, especially from psychoanalytically oriented investigators of religious conversion. In a case study of conversion, Salzman (1953: 187) interpreted conversion experience as a method of solving the conflict arising from hatred towards the father. Yet he also concluded that a conversion experience may be used as a solution for conflict with any authority figure, whether the father, the mother, or other significant persons. Rizzuto (1979: 51) wrote that the Freudian interpretation was consistent with the findings associating the father figure with the experience of conversion.

To sum up, much of psychoanalysis attributes religious conversion to the realm of simple attempts to handle repressed material seeking consciousness which are within the framework of religious beliefs. It is logical that Freud's theories would then reflect an attempt in conversion to resolve the Oedipal conflict (Gillespie, 1991: 124). The material from the sample studied here has not found evidence to confirm Freud's interpretation of conversion. Though there are subjects who expressed anger towards their father, the number of those who expressed anger towards their mother was also not insignificant. They are both male and female subjects and their indignation towards their father/mother did not seem to have come about as a result of repressed material, but was simply caused by their parents not giving them a happy childhood. So Freud's interpretation of religious conversion based on one sudden conversion experience involving a person's return to his religion of upbringing after a few days of hesitation between belief and disbelief does not necessarily reflect the whole nature of religious conversion. It cannot be an explanation for the conversion experiences of those studied here either, since they involve gradual inter-faith conversion. The analysis of this case does not elucidate, then, the various effects of fathers who were in actuality absent, or withdrawn, as were the fathers of many converts involved in this study. In addition, the Freudian interpretation of this case relies on the Oedipal urges of the male child. It is therefore less helpful in elucidating the experience of female converts, who are, according to the present data, about as likely as males to report a history of adequate fathering. In fact, as Freud (1961: 172) himself concluded "every case of conversion can not be understood as easily as this one." Ullman also concluded that Freudian interpretation does not fully explain the conversion experience of her 40 convert subjects. Ullman, after dealing with Freud's interpretation of the physician's conversion experience wrote that Freudian explanation of conversion "is concerned with the internal dynamics immediately preceding the experience and with the universal psychological themes thereby revealed. Emanating from universal Oedipal longings, the experience of the physician could have been the experience of any male, irrespective of his particular, unique relationship with his father" (Ullman, 1989: 49). Kildahl's (1977: 245) study of conversion intended to examine the hypothesis which resulted from the Freudian and Psychoanalytic literature. Since the physician's case was a sudden conversion experience Kildahl looked at the Oedipal situation in both sudden and gradual converts. He found nothing in his data to indicate that sudden converts perceive father figures or authority figures any differently than persons of a gradual religious development. His data did not support the idea that the Oedipal situation is handled in any distinctive way by the sudden converts.

## **B: CONVERSION AND ADOLESCENCE**

It is possible that religious conversional change may be particularly likely at certain times in the life cycle and during certain stages of development. Adolescence is a time for adjusting conformities and trying to sort out what is to be instituted into one's ideological framework and what is to be rejected totally. Various motivations for change exist within the adolescent. They include physically, emotionally, and intellectually motivated actions (Gillespie, 1991: 104). Psychologists who were interested in conversion phenomenon (James, 1962: 194ff, Coe, 1917: 163, Christensen, 1963: 209, Gillespie, 1991: 94) have suggested that adolescence, a prime time for conflict, identity crisis, searching, reevaluation, and value selection, is the most favourable time for religious conversion. Developmental psychologists have observed how adolescents are not only capable of abstract thought, but also have a desire for a rational explanation of everything. They believe that religion helps to provide this age group with a solution to individual problems of identity and purpose in life (Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi, 1975: 181).

American psychologists (Starbuck, 1911: 38, Coe, 1917: 163, Hall, 1920: 288-292) studying conversion at the turn of the century described the experience as a typical adolescent phenomenon connected with the normative changes of this age and with tendency to succumb to the power of groups. All of these studies focused on Christian conversion. In most cases, they concluded, conversions were a part of the inevitably intense social and psychological changes of adolescence which is essentially a normal form of adolescent development. Starbuck, for instance, observed that abrupt, dramatic conversion experiences are predominant in adolescence since the physiological changes at puberty condition the individual for conversion. He found that conversion shortens the period of stress and crisis inevitably experienced by all adolescents, and it prepares the adolescent for entry into adulthood.

The conversion experiences of the typical contemporary converts significantly differ from those of converts studied at the turn of the century. So do experiences of converts involved in this study. The early studies included converts returning to the original teachings from childhood later rejected in adolescence, or shifting from one Christian denomination to another which in the end brought little change of core beliefs, life-style, and cognitive change. The phenomenon then was seen as a part of the process of becoming an adult and moving from a "divided self" into a "unified self", and of securing "a better life". Fear, sense of sin, despair, feeling of guilt, and anger were some of the characteristics of the preconversion state (James, 1962: 202ff, Starbuck, 1911: 63). Literature on religious conversion then mainly focused on the elated mystical experience as well as profound struggle and torment involved in the process, but it lacked any attempt to

distinguish between different kinds of conversion in terms of their motivations or dynamics of the struggle preceding conversion experience (see Salzman, 1953: 181). Furthermore, the early Christian experience of conversions at the turn of the century mostly came about in some large group settings, such as revivalist meetings and church retreats attended by the convert's community, where young participants were expected to have a conversion experience by which the convert would be rewarded in his social environment. As Coe (1917: 164) pointed out, this expectation of a religious conversion provides a "psychological set" essential to the experience. The psychological set was also a significant factor in the conversions that occurred in Billy Graham's revivalist meetings during the 1950s (Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi, 1975). However, the psychological set for conversion even to one's parents' or environment's religious beliefs does not seem to exist any more. Society has gradually become secularised and having a conversion experience, or taking one's religion too seriously is considered something weird. Jason's recollection of his childhood and adolescent years may be evidence for this proposal.

"The school I went to in London was a totally secular oriented private school. So like most people in modern Britain I never had a chance either to accept or reject Christianity, simply because it has never been presented to me. And this is generally the case with the younger generation in England. They have not rejected Christianity, they simply don't know what it is. It's never been made clear to them either through schools or from parents or from the society at large. I think the reasons for this is partly the secular society and partly specifically the Anglo-Saxon weakness which regards it as a little bit rude to discuss this area. (It is exactly the opposite in the Muslim World, it is something people love to talk about it). In particularly cultured or educated English circles it is not talked and hence children never talk about it. They never hear about it and never certainly expose to it in an intelligent way through the media."

In contrast to converts at the turn of the century, contemporary converts within Christianity, especially those involved in new movements like the Unification Church adopt beliefs, cognitive changes, and a life-style different from their mainstream culture. They shy away from their parents' religious orientation and adopt new views, often severing their ties with their former social milieu.<sup>5</sup>

In sum, the material from the sample studied suggests that for the vast majority of the subjects interviewed adolescence was not the prime time for conversion. However, it was the period when they partly rejected the religion of childhood. Now the issue of conversion age will be investigated in detail.

### **1- Conversion Age**

Although it is evident that religious conversions may occur at any age, the majority of the research on conversion agrees that it is most likely to occur during adolescence. Records of

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<sup>5</sup> For a wider discussion of these points see Cox, 1979: 7-21, Ullman, 1989: 126.

15,471 conversion cases between 1899 and 1950s show that the average age is 15 years <sup>6</sup> Early studies, at the turn of the century, among Christian converts by Starbuck (1911 38), Coe (1917 163), and Hall (1920 288-292), found that religious conversion is indeed an adolescent phenomenon. Starbuck, for example, found that it occurred most frequently at the age of 16 for boys and age 13 for girls. Pratt (1948 122) saw adolescence as a normal period for the experience although he minimised the violent and sudden adolescent religious conversion experience in suggesting that the entire "moral and religious process of the adolescent period may well be called conversion." By and large this trend seems to continue today (Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi, 1975 61, Francis, 1984 69, Paloutzian, 1983 99). Levin and Zegans (1974) have documented how religious conversion can result in a new potentially viable self-definition, and can be a positive factor in the crisis of adolescent turmoil. Christensen (1963 209) clinically studied 22 men with a history of religious conversion who were under psychotherapy because of incapacitating mental disorders. All of Christensen's subjects were adolescents at the time of conversion and the dynamic impact of this transitional stage was a determining factor. Christensen found an unconscious conflict which related to distorted identifications, a depreciated self-concept, and psychosexual pathology. His study also revealed that a fundamentalistic religious belief was an important part of their early environment and psychic life. Contrary to Christensen's finding, my interviewees' accounts of their childhood experiences and their parents' attitudes towards religion showed that fundamentalistic religious belief was not an important part of their early environment and they rejected the religious beliefs of their childhood in adolescence.

Conversion age for the present sample presents a great deviation from the previously mentioned studies of religious conversion in the West. The average conversion age is 29.7, ranging from 15 to 61 with the vast majority falling into 23-45 years age group (see table 3.4). Only one (1.4%) experienced conversion before 17. Eighteen (25.7%) converted between 17 and 22. Forty three (61.4%) fell into 23-45 age group. And eight (11.4%) experienced conversion between 46 and 65. The data analysis found the relation between gender and conversion age non-significant. Poston's (1988 412)<sup>7</sup> study of 70 European and American converts to Islam found the average conversion age to be 31.4 years. Nevertheless, this study's finding on conversion age being high should be treated cautiously, since as the sample was not drawn at random it may not be representative of all native British converts to Islam.

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<sup>6</sup> P. Johnson, *The Psychology of Religion*, NY: Abingdon, 1959, 127, cited by Christensen, 1963 210.

<sup>7</sup> Poston recruited his subjects through Muslim organisations and also used written accounts of the converts to Islam in Muslim periodicals, booklets, and books. Only 12 of Poston's subjects were recruited through Muslim organisations who filled in a questionnaire.



Table 3 4 Conversion age groups

Age Groups	Total n=70 (100%)	Male n=50 (71%)	Female n=20 (29%)
11-16	1 (1 4%)	1 (1 4%)	0 (0%)
17-22	18 (25 7%)	14 (20%)	4 (5 7%)
23-45	43 (61 5%)	30 (42 9%)	13 (18 6%)
46-65	8 (11 4%)	5 (7 1%)	3 (4 3%)

However, as opposed to early and contemporary studies on conversion within Christianity some studies on conversion to contemporary religious cults indicate that conversions take place at a later age, during late teens or early 20s. The average age for Ullman's (1989: 110) sample was 21. Johnson's (1977: 40) study, which covered four groups, Meher Baba, Zen Buddhism, Divine Light Mission and Hare Krishna, found that the average conversion age was in the early 20s ranging anywhere from 18 to 35. Deutsch's (1975: 168) subjects converted between 19-35 with a median age of 25. Galanter's (1980: 1577) study of converts to the Unification Church revealed that they convert in their early 20s. There are other studies which support the proposal that conversion may occur at older ages. Bouquet (1932: 120) writes that seeing conversion as only an adolescent phenomenon "is too severe a restriction of the field, since conversion, though certainly natural, is a complex and gradual psychic process which is prepared by individual conditions over a long period. It is much more than the moral and religious crisis of adolescence. It may happen that the completion of the process is reached long after adolescence, and even in late middle life." Jung (1973: 109-131) found that middle age and after were the prime years for religious concern. He emphasised mid-to-late thirties as a period of moving from an extroverted, external-reality-mastery orientation to an introverted inner-reality-understanding orientation. Hiltner<sup>8</sup> writes that conversion "is most important, most likely, and most cultivatable in the thirties, rather than being regarded primarily as an adolescent phenomenon." Ferm<sup>9</sup> believes the ripe age to be considerably higher and points out that by using college students as their subjects, many of the early studies were unwittingly operating with a truncated sample. In surveys of three churches, Ferm found the average age of conversion to be 43, 46, and 41 years respectively. Converts made by Graham's first British campaign averaged in their mid-twenties. A large number of great Christian figures like St Paul, St Augustine, and Tolstoy converted late in life. Scobie's (see Scobie, 1975: 51) study of 170 theological students found that 47 percent experienced conversion after their seventeenth birthday.

<sup>8</sup> S. Hiltner "Toward a Theology of conversion in the light of Psychology", *Pastoral Psychology*, 1966, 17, 35-42, cited by Scroggs and Douglas, 1977: 260.

<sup>9</sup> R. O. Ferm, *The Psychology of Christian conversion*, Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1959, cited by Gillespie, 1991: 107.

In sum, the material from the sample studied suggests that conversion is beyond adolescence. Now emotional and cognitive concerns in adolescence will be examined.

## **2- Emotional and Cognitive Issues in Adolescence**

For most theorists, identity formation and the time of youth go hand in hand. Youth are involved in many emotional, cognitive, behavioural issues. They struggle with life or have ideological conflicts regarding altruism or emotional intensity. Many youths reflect this tension and quest for identity. As the adolescent context for religious conversion reflects the same thing, many look for the "right choice" in these years. Their cognitive development impacts their religious concerns. This context may be a time of faith development for youth, and it may be perfect for religious conversion to come to the fore, which may provide an answer to identity confusion (Gillespie, 1991: 180-1). However, scholars like Baumeister (1986: 170) have suggested that the religious conversion in the form of solving adolescent identity crisis is something of the past. The decline of religious faith and religious experience among youth has deprived them of means of solving identity crises. Now, whether it was emotional or cognitive matters that the converts interviewed were concerned with during adolescence will be examined.

As discussed earlier, recent studies report that a history of problem relationships with parents and an unhappy childhood and adolescence are characteristics of religious converts irrespective of their religion of origin or the religious group that they joined. Despite the many sociological and theological differences among them, the different religious groups seem to respond to similar psychological needs (see Ullman, 1989: 17-8). Ullman's (1989: 122-3) study of conversion concluded that "it is not the 'typical' but emotionally troubled adolescent who is likely to become a religious convert".<sup>10</sup> 65 percent of Ullman's sample characterised their adolescence as extremely unhappy, as against 6.7 percent of the control group of nonconverts. So a turbulent adolescence is associated with conversion. However, 64 percent of those who characterised their adolescence as extremely unhappy also characterised their childhood as extremely unhappy. For the majority of them the psychological upheaval of childhood continued during their adolescence.

The accounts given by those interviewed for this study do not strongly support Ullman's finding associating adolescence with turmoil. 36 (51.4%) of the 70 reported no emotional stress during adolescence. 17 (24.3%) described their adolescence as moderate or mixed, and 17 (24.3%) said they had an unhappy adolescence. Yet the data confirms Ullman's finding with regard to the connection between an unhappy childhood and adolescent turmoil. Significantly,

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<sup>10</sup> Adolescence was described as unhappy by the converts in Ullman's sample ( $\chi^2 = 29.84, p < .001$ ), for statistical results see Ullman, 1982: 190.

16 of those 17 who reported stressful adolescence also reported an unhappy childhood. The association between an unhappy childhood and emotional stress during adolescence is highly significant ( $\chi^2$  with continuity correction = 20.259,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ). And more significantly, all of them also reported father absence or father being withdrawn. (There is also a highly significant association between reported emotional stress during adolescence and reported father absence/withdrawn  $\chi^2$  with continuity correction = 12.03,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ). These findings clearly illustrate that their turmoil during adolescence was a continuation of their childhood experiences, such as parental divorce. On the other hand, those who reported happy adolescence had a stable childhood. Offer and Offer's<sup>11</sup> study of adolescent boys lends support to the present finding. Offer and Offer found that those who were viewed as in a state of turmoil had a common background of family crisis such as divorce and overt marital conflicts. However, some converts involved in this study have experienced a tormented adolescence period as a result of their relationship with the outside world, which has eventually precipitated their conversion. Steve, Raymond, Tony, and Henry are among those who have gone through such experiences. Consider the case of Henry.

Henry described his relationship with his parents as good when he was a child. Then he went to boarding school from the age of 11 to 16 and that soured the relationship with his parents and made them distant and "also", Henry said "because coming towards adolescence was a difficult time. So I was a bit rebellious and that led to me leaving home at the age of 16." Henry came to London first from a small village where he was brought up. He was not prepared for what he encountered in London, and got himself into a lot of trouble merely by lack of familiarity with London and indeed he became ill. At that time very large numbers of young people were smoking hashish and he took part as well. He described himself then as unstable, and having no roots. He could not concentrate on doing anything and did not have any source of income apart from Social Security. He got pretty ill for six months and was involved in an organisation called *Release* which helped drug users to get off drugs. Fortunately, he ended up in a hospital where a social worker helped him get a scholarship to provide him with funds to do A-levels. As soon as he got his A-levels he left school. "So that put me in a kind of more balanced situation, but it still wasn't easy. There was a lot going on and changing in the society. I felt incomplete and I had a very strong dissatisfaction with the whole structure of the society at that time." Henry was struggling to form an identity. He did not have a suitable atmosphere or group around to provide him with this identity achievement. He was yearning to associate himself with something, a group or an ideology. Some

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<sup>11</sup> D. Offer and J. L. Offer, *From Teenage to Young Manhood*, NY: Basic Books, 1975, cited by Ullman, 1989: 123.

of Henry's friends had become members of Divine Light Mission. Henry had a lot of contact with them and went to their meetings to see Guru Maha Raj Ji, but "it did not feel right", he said. He was living in a hostel then. And there was a couple on the very top floor and another friend of theirs was on the same floor as Henry. He knew them by sight coming up and down the stairs and he heard from his other friends in the same hostel that this couple had become Muslim. Henry was interested just to know what it meant to become a Muslim. He did not even know the word "Islam". As he got to know them it occurred to him to ask them if they had books on their religion. The man said that they did not, but he could talk to him about it. Henry went along and they talked about Islam. They were Sufi Muslims involved in the group of 'Abd al-Qādir as-Sufi. In his second meeting with the man "something" impressed Henry. "While we were talking he said, 'Sorry, it's time for the prayer now, I have to pray.' There was just one room, so he went into the corner and prayed. 'I think that kind of made an impression, because I saw that somebody was doing something practical and it caught my attention.'" Henry was also impressed by the hospitality of the couple. He said "It was different. I mean there are many hospitable British people, but it is not that you notice in London." As their relationship proceeded they one day invited Henry to come to one of their meetings. Henry found their group very warm and morally much more interesting than most of the people he had been dealing with. He attended their meeting for 4-5 months at the end of which he made up his mind to embrace Islam.

Humans need to have an organised framework within which their life takes on meaning and purpose. Adolescence is precisely that period in which persons begin to orient themselves within some meaningful system. Thus, religious systems exist precisely as one type of meaning system in which individuals can orient themselves, understand, interpret, and direct their lives (Spilka, 1985: 200). As well as the emotional side of adolescence this study also tried to explore converts' interest in religious, political, or other questions that reached beyond the circumstances of their own lives such as concern over social injustice, unresolved specific religious doubts. Twenty three (32.9%) of the 70 people studied reported cognitive, existential, or religious concerns in adolescence as opposed to those 17 (24.3%) who reported emotional matters.<sup>12</sup>

There are some periods in individuals' lives that are more crucial than others for change in structural form. Adolescence seems to be one of these periods. It is a period of transition in approach to cognitive tasks and moral issues (Marcia, 1980: 160). Adolescence is a period for decision making in religion, politics, work, social relationships, etc. In religion most decide not to be religious, some become more committed to their religion of childhood, and a few become

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<sup>12</sup> In the case of the subjects who reported both emotional and cognitive concerns, the subject was asked to identify the most important one as s/he perceived it.

committed to a different religion (Argyle and Bert-Hallahmi, 1975 59ff) Erskson (1968 128-135) argued that the religious and ideological consistency of a society is very important for adolescents who are attempting to make sense out of the adult world Part of the motivation for conversion to alien religions, then, involves youthful dissatisfaction with the ideological and religious inconsistencies of the larger society Many of the converts involved in the present study claim that adolescence was the time when they began questioning the application of their religion in society at large or looking for answers to life's basic questions It was in adolescence that they attempted to fashion a consistent personal code of moral behaviour in a changing culture of uncertain values Deutsch's (1975 168) subjects also reported disinterest or disillusionment with the religion of origin in later adolescence, although a few reported an upsurge of religious interest in early adolescence

In Britain no more than 15 percent of the population attends church each week Over half of those who attend at the age of 13 will have ceased to do so by the time they are 20 Some 50 percent of the teenagers attending Roman Catholic services will have given up doing so even before they are 20 and about 75 percent of the Anglicans Furthermore, by the time of the school leaving age, very few young people would still be claiming allegiance to the Christian churches (Francis, 1984 10) This is, in fact, what most of my subjects experienced in late adolescence It must be stated that their drift from their religion was part of a general social movement The "psychological set" to accept one's parents' or environment's religious beliefs as used to happen in the past did not seem to be the case for them A firm religious context which can enable the adolescent to interpret his personal experience in terms of religious symbols and the religious framework which may provide a clear model of how to resolve the adolescent phase, by presenting a model of proper Christian life does not seem to be available to the modern adolescent (see Baumeister, 1986 114) However, many of those who drift away from religion in adolescence come back to religion, their own, or to another, as in the case of the present sample

To conclude then, adolescence was the time for most of the converts interviewed to shy away from their childhood religion And many lost belief in their religion of upbringing and began seeking contentment in other religions 29 percent of the converts got involved in NRMs after they broke with the religion of their childhood When the preconversion period was examined it was found that only 8 (11%) described themselves as practising the religion of upbringing prior to conversion Others were either nominal or atheist (13%)

Although the material from the sample studied confirms that various motivations for physical, emotional, and intellectual change exist within the adolescent, and that adolescence is a

time for adjusting conformities and trying to sort out what is to be accepted and what is to be rejected totally, it does not suggest that adolescence is the prime time for conversion. Adolescence, it suggests, prepares the ground for conversional change, not because adolescence is especially traumatic, but because it is the period in which they partly/completely reject the religion of childhood. Even in the cases where the subjects had had an emotionally troubled adolescence, it was merely a continuation of the psychological upheaval of childhood. However, it must be stated here that it may not be so for all native British converts to Islam.

### **3- Rebellion Conversion**

Rebelliousness is another characteristic of adolescent conversion. Allison (1969: 30) found that converts' recollections of their adolescence reveal a history of marked rebelliousness towards religious values and observances during adolescence, following a long period of steady belief during childhood. Heinrich (1977, 655) found among converts to Catholic Pentecostalism that they, though varied widely, rebelled against the church before encountering Pentecostalism. Erikson (1962: 134) described the adolescent as feeling exposed to anarchic manifestations of his drives, needing oversystematised thoughts and overvalued words to give a semblance of order to his inner world.

Some converts involved in this study described their adolescence as a period of rebellion. The interviews with them showed that in some cases, though rare, hatred, resentment, hostile, and destructive attitudes towards their parents or society have been involved in adolescence and the preconversion period. In some cases, as a consequence of this rebellion a number of the interviewees had converted to Islam. This type of conversion was found in three cases. These individuals had converted in late adolescence, relatively younger than most of the subjects in the present sample. The emotions cited above have been noted by many observers, yet they have rarely been seen as the focus of a preconversion struggle, nor has conversion itself been interpreted as an attempt to deal with them (see Salzman 1953: 183). However, a few have drawn attention to the rebellion type conversion. For example, Heinrich (1977: 654) wrote that "some descriptions of religious conversion involves a dramatic turnabout, either accepting a belief system and behaviours strongly at odds with one's previous cognitive structure and actions or returning to a set of beliefs and commitments against which one has been strongly in rebellion." Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi (1975: 59) recognised that many adolescent conversions may be understood in the context of rebellion against their parents' religiosity.

Failure in socialisation is considered to be one of the factors in conversion (Dollah, 1979: 58). People who do not undergo a normal process of socialisation during their early personality

development may form their own world view, and finally exhibit a behaviour deviant to their society. They may behave against the norms and sanctions of the social world around them.

The case of Steve gives an example of the rebellion type of conversion. Steve left school when 15 and got mixed up for two years with some motorbike gangs who were being influenced by Black Magic and Witchcraft. At the time he drank a lot and smoked hashish. Then he became engaged to a Hindu girl for about three years and read all the Hindu scriptures and literature. But his engagement came to an end, partly because Steve did not like the religion and partly because of his fiancée's parents. From 15 to 19 Steve described himself as not caring about life. He enjoyed being different from other people. He said

"I enjoyed the fact that I would walk into a pub where there were all very ordinary people and I would be dressed in a leather jacket and filthy jeans and looked nasty. But everything was just a game and everything was to try and project an image and to cause some sort of stir amongst other people."

In 1979 Steve went to New York to stay for a few months. While he was there the Iranian revolution took place and some Americans were held hostage in Iran. Steve always used to find Americans very "cocky" and "arrogant". And with respect to the hostage situation he told them "Are you getting some justice back now? This little country over there giving you a kick in the teeth." While the hostage affair was going on Steve came back to England and the first thing he did was to find out "what sort of religion can make America come down on its knees?" And he bought a copy of the Qur'ān and read it from front to back. Steve felt that things said in the Qur'ān were almost directed at him. He said "It was saying 'Don't do this, don't do that!' And I was thinking 'Well, whoever has written this has been watching me for the last few years. It was written all down what I have been doing wrong. It was really a shock. Things that I thought I had been doing quite private were all there and were open.'" After a few weeks Steve decided to go to a Mosque to find out more and spoke to an *imām* who gave him some books. He read them and thought some were "silly", some were quite "sensible". From the mosque he met a number of people and one took him to his house and he stayed with him for about two weeks. The way this Muslim man treated Steve had an enormous effect on him. The following week Steve prayed in the mosque by just copying everyone, and after the prayer the man who had hosted Steve came in and said "If you want to become a Muslim, now you can do the *shahādah*." Steve did not turn him down and became Muslim when he was 21.

So far Steve's conversion seems to be intellectual as well as affectional, and was quicker than the normal conversion process for the majority of the present sample. However, Steve

recounted that there was a background to his conversion latent in his personality. His rebellious feelings stimulated his conversion as much as his intellect and affection.

"I think throughout everything with me there is an element of rebellion. I've always rebelled against something. If it wasn't my father, it would have to be something else when he died. So I rebelled against the society. So I've joined this motorbike gang, we called ourselves "The Outlaws." It was rebellion. And then once that ended it had been another rebellion. So the next rebellion perhaps was initially the thought of joining a religion (Islam) which was obviously so hated by the people in the West. I thought that's that, that will get up their nose if I join a religion they despise. But that was, may be, just the prod, that wouldn't have been enough to keep me in the religion, that might have been enough to push me towards it. But the fact that I stayed here was really because what the religion had to offer. If someone has come and said to me, "Right, you have only become Muslim because you were rebelling against the society." I would have said, "Fine, that might have been true for the six months, then not much longer than that because I would have found a new method of rebelling against this society. Some friends just thought I was mad and went into another thing. I don't have to remain in a cult of people with a leader in order to stay as a Muslim. What these people (my ex-friends) have to do they have to remain attached to their cult because the minute they are removed from the cult the effect goes. To me, that means they haven't got a true belief. They are only doing it because of the pressure put upon them by the cult. Now whereas with me if you stuck me on the middle of the mountain on my own, I would still be a Muslim. I don't need to have this cult around me and all these people forcing me to believe anything."

Another example of this type of rebellion is provided by Salzman (1953: 182). One of Salzman's patients under psychotherapy, who had been raised as a moderate Protestant, was planning to convert to Catholicism at the time of the therapy. The patient was full of both subtle and direct hostility directed at his parents, primarily his father. His family had always been quite antagonistic towards the Catholic Church and his conversion to Catholicism, he assumed, would come as a double blow to his parents since he would both join a church they disliked, and he would remove himself from contact with them.

Commitment by the adolescent to views and beliefs other than those of his parents is an indicator of autonomy. Josselson (1980: 190-7) distinguishes four subphases of adolescent individuation of which the first two are often indicative of adolescent conversions: (1) differentiation, (2) practice and experimentation, (3) rapprochement, and (4) consolidation. During the *first* phase the adolescent's psychological needs begin and he attempts to detach himself from parental authority and search for other sources. He starts questioning parental values and concludes that they have their own attributes and flaws and realises that their advice may not be relevant to his own life. In the *second* phase the adolescent exercises this new spirit of rebelliousness. By practising his separateness he likes opposing, contradicting, and provoking his parents. In the *third* phase the adolescent feels ready to reaccept his parents' guidance and endeavours to reestablish the bond with his parents. New cooperative views and selective acceptance replace the outright rebellion. The *final* phase leads to identity formation which



involves the consolidation of a sense of personal identity that incorporates independent choices with a selective acceptance of past identification

Erick had similar feelings towards his parents as those of Salzman's patient. Erick's conversion seemed largely to reflect Josselson's four subphases of adolescent individualisation. Erick rebelled against his parents' heavy disciplinarian attitude and therefore the community they associated with. Erick's parents were Jews who practised the traditional side of Judaism rather than the actual belief. Erick went to Jewish day school till he was about nine and then was sent to boarding school till 17. He described boarding school as "a whole world within a world, like a prison." He was not happy with the way he was brought up. He even started smoking at a young age thinking that it was a form of rebellion. "I was in the position of having it forced on me, rammed down my throat. I disliked the idea of being forced to keep things, I don't like being told to do something." When Erick was 15 his father died and his mother who was more strict than his father was in total charge of him. His father's death brought him into the real world with a "bang" and Erick tried to be religious for 3-4 months. "That's when I really started to think and use my brain. I started to question things. And I was feeling incomplete. Essentially I was wondering what are we here for? To earn money, to try and enjoy ourselves as much as possible. What is the reason for this, what is the point of life, what am I doing all these for? And I wanted to turn to the Jewish religion more." Yet it did not take long before Erick totally abandoned Judaism deciding that it is not compatible with the 20th century life. When he was still at boarding school his uncle, a solicitor, who wanted Erick to make more friends, sent him to stay with one of his clients who was a Muslim during the summer vacation. Erick stayed with them for a few days and spoke to their children of his age on Islam. "They seemed to have a very stable life and they were very happy. I saw them praying and I was asking inevitable questions. They were content. They lived life for a reason and they had a stable good household. And I saw these people once or twice because my grandma stopped me seeing them, she didn't want her grandson mixing with Muslims." From this meeting with Muslims Erick had gained a chance to upset his mother and the rest of the family, and he soon got in touch with an Islamic organisation which provided him with some information and literature. He decided to convert nine months after he met this Muslim family. Erick, as his story suggests, did not deny Judaism. It was the autocracy of the clergy or the strictness of his parents that he rebelled against. "Judaism in its original, if you look at what the Torah says," he said, "is good and clear, but if you look at what has been done to it in the name of tradition, and the law of rabbis, that's where it has gone wrong. I don't want any priests, rabbis or anything to intermeddle with. I pray to God, for God sees everything I do."

As the above accounts illustrate, totalistic struggle against parental authority or society was the most outstanding manifestation of their adolescence. By conversion and adopting a world view that is opposed to that of their parents they attempted to separate from their parents. Conversion, therefore, divorced them from influences such as parental authority that dominated their lives and supplied new figures for emulation. According to Erikson's concept of identity formation through conversion they may be classified as "identity achieved" for they formed a new commitment after having questioned parental values.

#### **4- Eriksonian Concept of Identity: Moratorium and Conversion at a Later Age**

Conversion may provide the adolescent with exploration of the self in the context of a group, tradition, or religion. It may also give some central perspective, direction, personal fulfilment and goal orientation in moments of identity crisis or ideological confusion. In this sense Erikson's notion of identity seems relevant to the understanding of the conversion phenomenon of adolescence. Erikson places identity within the context of ego-psychoanalytic theory, viewing it as the epigenetically based psycho-social task, distinctive, but not exclusive, to adolescence (Marcia, 1980: 159). The components of Erikson's notion of identity combine subjective experiences of unity, continuity, and autonomy that arise in the search for one's "true" nature, with objective behavioural manifestations at the personal as well as the societal level (Ullman, 1989: 112). Identity here refers to an existential position, to an inner organisation of needs, abilities, and self-perceptions as well as to a sociopolitical stance.

"Identity achievement" and "identity diffusion" are polar alternatives of status in Erikson's theory, which hypothesises psychological crisis occurring in late adolescence. A major result of advanced civilisation has been the extension of the term "social adolescence" which delays the time at which many young people assume adult roles and responsibilities. As society increases in complexity, educational demands on the young increase and require an additional investment of training for work. Erikson (1968: 143, 156) refers to this societally sanctioned intermediary period as a kind of "psychological moratorium" in human development. Erikson views this phase of the life cycle as a time of growing occupational and ideological commitment. Facing such imminent adult tasks the individual is required to synthesise childhood identifications in such a way that he can both establish a reciprocal relationship with his society and maintain a feeling of continuity within himself. Marcia (1966: 552), studying 86 college boys attempted to examine Erikson's notion of identity concerning "objective" manifestations of identity, primarily focusing on the process of crisis and commitment in the domain of ideology, and occupation defining identity by presence or absence of period of questioning (crisis) and the formation of a commitment in these

areas Marcia described four identity status (1) **"Identity-achieved"** individuals have arrived at their own clear-cut decisions after experiencing a period of questioning and exploration in the domains of occupation and ideology With respect to ideology they have reevaluated past beliefs and achieved a resolution, (2) **"Identity-diffused"** individuals seem to have made little progress towards commitments in these areas, some experiencing no crisis, some being unable to resolve it They are either uninterested in ideological matters or take a smorgasbord approach in which one outlook seems as good to them as another and they are not averse to sampling from all (3) Individuals grouped as **"moratorium"** seem to be in the middle of exploring alternative directions concerning these domains and have not yet arrived at definite commitments They are in the crisis period with commitments rather vague, they are distinguished from the identity-diffused subjects by the appearance of an active struggle to make commitments (4) **"foreclosure"** individuals are distinguished by not having experienced a crisis, yet expressing commitment For them it is difficult to tell where their parents' goals for them leave off and where their own goals begin They become what others have prepared or intended them to become as a child Marcia also found that most adolescents change in their identity status between the ages of 18 and 22, shifting from foreclosure or identity diffusion to identity achievement

The Eriksonian concept of identity may help us understand conversion beyond adolescence although Erikson does not detail conversion experience specifically Personal identity and, in a deeper sense and at a more conscious level, ego identity, are influenced by factors not entirely unlike those of conversion experience Among the products of conversion are new beliefs and values Identity often results in values which include religious ideas and, therefore, a close relationship with religious experience is evident Religion provides for youth and adults a theology (ideology) and a resource for the development of peace among humankind (see Erikson, 1962 52, Wright, 1982 148-150, Gillespie, 1991 163) Erikson charted psychosocial crisis relating them to development of value-structures He stressed that secure identity rests on the foundation of trust, autonomy, initiative, etc , and that the identity crisis, which focuses in adolescence, but is repeated during middle age in the form of the integrity crisis, interacts with ideology It may, therefore, be concluded from Erikson's theories that both the identity crisis in adolescence and the integrity crisis in the middle years constitute ripe moments for conversion (Erikson, 1964 86, 102, 115, 180, see also Scroggs and Douglas, 1977 260)

Moratorium may be defined as a time when the near young adult avoids premature overcommitment either by taking time out, or by committing himself to an arduous apprenticeship in some field of endeavour (Fowler, 1981 43) The moratorium period may end in young adulthood or adulthood with conversion and therefore with identity achievement Here Fowler's

stages of faith may be helpful to understand how and when the moratorium period ends. Fowler's (1981: 161) analysis of faith development suggests that somewhere between Stage 3 (Conventional-Synthetic Faith, which covers adolescence) and Stage 4 (Individuative-Reflective Faith, which covers young adulthood) the individual begins to make a cognitive shift to a more critical, personal view of their own authority in religious decisions.

As presented earlier, in a Christian context the individual typically experiences conversion at the age 15 or 16 and this becomes a period of maximal commitment to the religion. Yet this commitment is usually followed by a period of lesser commitment or "backsliding" during which time the convert concentrates upon other aspects of life such as education, choice of career and marriage. When some measure of occupational, mental and financial security has been obtained there is usually a renewed commitment to religious values (Starbuck, 1911: 357). When many were converting to the religion of their parents in adolescence, the converts involved in this study have rejected a religious belief. In contrast they have converted to another religion, namely Islam in the late twenties. This is when an individual is supposed to renew his commitments to his original religious values. During the time between rejection of childhood religion and conversion, most adopted secular identities by which they accomplished integration without resort to conversion, and some tried to explore other alternatives. Yet this was only a temporary and perhaps incomplete integration, for they eventually searched for a religious alternative. They, as Frederick accounted, "let the religious thing lie asleep" at the back of their mind for a few years.

During the time between rejection of childhood religion and conversion the subjects involved in this study were, in general, neglectful of religion or was experimenting with other alternatives. This period may well be explained by Erikson's observations regarding "moratorium" period. Erikson observed that many adolescents struggling with the integration process opt to "retreat" for a period of time in order to work out a plan of self-reorganisation or integration without disturbance from mundane realities. Erikson posited that moratorium individuals go through a period "before they come to their crossroads, which they often do in their late twenties." Erikson believes that in this period the individual comes to a decision as what they are and what they are going to be. In his psychoanalytic analysis of the life of Martin Luther, Erikson describes Luther's experience in monastery, Augustine's experience with Manichaeism, or Bernard Shaw's personality crisis experience before conversion as a moratorium (Erikson, 1962: 43-4).

Having an unstable childhood because of parental problems or father absence, etc., or a thorny relationship with parents or the environment may have pushed some individuals into a

moratorium period before "identity achievement" Jacobson<sup>13</sup>, investigating differences between identity achievement and moratorium on college seniors reported that "identity achieved" students had a higher frequency of supportive paternal relationships and more harmonious authority relationships, in general, than did "moratorium" students. The data analysis lends support to Jacobson's finding of a relationship between moratorium and parental support. Those who reported conversion after they experienced a long period of moratorium (i.e. those converted after 22) were more likely to have had less parental support, especially from their father. "Moratorium" was significantly associated with "relation with father" ( $\chi^2$  with continuity correction = 6.993, df=1,  $p < .01$ )

In the following excerpt from the interview with Todd, formerly a Catholic who became Muslim when 22, the fruits of the conversion experience are described in terms reminiscent of the Eriksonian criteria for "moratorium". The conversion seems to help Todd consolidate realistic long-term commitments.

"My family were so strict that I couldn't ask questions on religion. I don't think it was because they said, "Don't ask questions!", but it was because I wasn't allowed to speak personal. I wasn't allowed to develop a sort of personality. So I just thought I was best to keep quiet and ask no questions anyway. I didn't know what to think. I used to swing from being very right-wing to being very left-wing. When I got to university at the age of 18, I was very left-wing for about 3-4 years before becoming Muslim. I think that helped me become a Muslim because I was very conscious of social values and even moral values. I thought Socialism was the most appropriate answer. I thought they were the only honest people trying to solve all these problems by helping the poor and the needy and trying to put the break on Capitalism. I felt that I was trying to find the best answers to society's problems. I still at the age of 21 didn't have the answer. I felt that I needed to have the answer very much. I tried Christianity at the age of 18 again which I'd given up at the age of 15. I studied a fair amount about Christianity, but it just didn't have any effect on me."

Through his encounter with Islam, Todd came to believe that he found answers to the questions he had been asking himself for so many years. He used to criticise the permissiveness of society with respect to things like homosexuality and Aids, and he was attracted by the moral stand of Islam and the Muslims he met. He said:

"They didn't drink, they didn't have any relationship outside marriage and they were very happy not doing it and they were very confident in arguing these points. I read the Qur'an (one month before I converted), the verses about morality and relationships. There were so many verses about what is right, what is wrong. This is the most fundamental part that gives you a framework. Islam gives you the basis. It gives you personal hygiene, five times prayer a day, etc. There is no way you can avoid Islam during your day. You have to think about God, you have to think about your work-mates, your family, etc."

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<sup>13</sup> S. Jacobson, *The Achievement and Moratorium Identity Status*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, New York University, 1977, cited by Marcia, 1980: 169.

Having analysed Erikson's concept of personal identity formation and the characteristics of religious conversion, Gillespie (1991: 183-191) found primary relationships between contexts of both experiences as they appear in the developmental, emotional, psychological, and societal milieu of life. Gillespie classified these relationships as (1) Both the experience of religious conversion and identity are centrally associated with change in the lives of individuals, (2) both experiences are concerned with the changing of behaviour and with the result of a changed frame of reference. Ethical implications follow changed mental constructs, (3) these two experiences affect the very centre of awareness in a person. Religious conversion accomplishes this through a basic change of viewpoint and a forthcoming commitment to a "way" or ideology. Personal identity experiences succeed through the successful resolution of crisis and the virtues and values formed in the process, (4) both experiences may have roots within the conflicts of adolescence, (5) in identity experience and in religious conversion there is an intensity of feelings towards commitment, (6) religious conversion and personal identity experience deal with existential questions.

Other literature on conversion also observed that converts go through a moratorium-like period before conversion. Lofland and Stark (1965: 868) mentioned that potential converts "persist in stressful situations with little or no relief", or "take specifically problem-directed action to change troublesome portions of their lives, without adopting a different world view to interpret them," or take advantage of "a number of manoeuvres to put the problems out of mind". They described it as "compensations for or distractions from problems of living," and they specifically mentioned such things as mass media addiction, child-rearing, immersion in work, and, more spectacularly, alcoholism, suicide, and promiscuity. Richardson and Stewart (1977: 823) introduced the term "muddling through" to the literature of conversion. They proposed that people try to muddle through before dealing with their problem in more dramatic ways. "Muddling through may well be something of a quiescent state to which people regularly return when more dramatic solutions are not viewed as available." Richardson and Stewart add a few more examples of the use of a conventional perspective (as put by Lofland and Stark) to solve problems. For example, such things as getting divorced, getting married, moving, changing jobs, taking a holiday, dropping out of school, and affiliating with a conventional religious (or other type of) group or changing such affiliation.

When dealing with the phenomenon of conversion in older age groups, looking at the moral side of the experience may also offer an explanation. Scholars like Thouless (1979: 104) and Lonergan (1972: 238ff) posit that religious conversion may involve a few types of change: social, moral, and intellectual. Through moral conversion "swearing Tom", as Thouless calls him,

whose conflict was primarily a moral one, changed from an old way of life, one of swearing, to a new way where the old life-style was ruled out. This implies a shift in the basis of moral and ethical choice. Yet one would argue that moral development is impossible until a higher or more mature state of thinking had occurred. Kohlberg's (1984: 172ff) cognitive-developmental theory of moral reasoning might be of use here. Kohlberg categorised moral development into six stages, and these six stages are grouped into three major levels: (1) the preconventional<sup>14</sup> moral level is the level of most children under 9, some adolescents, and most adult criminal offenders, (2) the conventional level is the level of most adolescents and adults, (3) the postconventional level is reached by a minority of adults and is usually reached only after the age of 20. This level includes such mature concepts as self-chosen direction, a more universal ethical outlook, evaluation of options, and personal ethical principles that move one to ethical decisions. All of these changes require a cognitive conversion in areas of morality. The postconventional individual judges by principle rather than by convention. He questions and redefines society in terms of an individual moral perspective. This perspective is of an individual who has made the moral commitments or holds the standards on which a good or "just" society must be based (Kohlberg, 1984: 178ff). Since movement to an autonomous, postconventional morality requires specifically adult experiences, religious conversion with a deeply moral tone would need maturity and life experience that only adults could possibly have. This suggests that adults would be the prime age for deeply moral conversion (see Conn, 1985: 513; Gillespie, 1991: 56, 96). In short, Kohlberg implies that conversion of a moral variety demands a certain maturity of thought and cognition for which later ages, possibly at the stage of postconventional morality, are better suited.

To conclude, analysis of the preconversion histories of the converts interviewed suggests that conversion is a complex and gradual process which is prepared by individual conditions over a long period. For the vast majority of the subjects interviewed conversions occurred beyond adolescence and were likely to occur in the late twenties. The Eriksonian concept of identity achievement/diffusion, and therefore the moratorium period which may end in young adulthood or adulthood with conversion, and therefore with identity achievement may help us understand conversion at a later age. During moratorium, the converts involved in this study made themselves concerned with life's basic questions like one's purpose in life, and questioned the values their own society presented to them. During this time they adopted secular identities letting the religious quest lie asleep at the back of their mind, but eventually searched for a religious alternative. This will be explored in the following chapter.

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<sup>14</sup> The term "conventional" means conforming to and upholding the rules and expectations and conventions of society or authority just because they are society's rules, expectations, or conventions.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**CONVERSION PROCESS**



## A: BACKGROUND ANALYSIS

In this chapter the background of the converts interviewed about religion and social status will be analysed. The two years prior to conversion will be examined, in terms of antecedents and motifs involved in the conversion. Then certain processes involved in the conversion experiences of the current group of converts will be presented, and compared with the Lofland and Stark process model <sup>1</sup>

### 1- Religion

The converts who participated in this study span a wide range of backgrounds regarding their former beliefs and practices. They were predominantly (nominal) Christians. Fifty one (73%) of the 70 reported that they were raised as Church of England, 12 (17%) were Catholics, 3 (4%) were Methodists, 4 (6%) were Jews (see table 4.1). By and large, the sample seems to represent approximately the size of these religious communities in Britain. The approximate community size for these communities throughout whole of UK are: Church of England 26.6 million, Roman Catholics 5.2 million, Methodists 1.5 million, Jews 0.4 million <sup>2</sup>

Table 4.1 Religion of Origin (n=70)

Church of England	51 (73%)
Catholic	12 (17%)
Jewish	4 (6%)
Methodist	3 (4%)

Only 8 (11%) of the 70 reported that they were practising their religion of origin prior to conversion. Those who defined themselves as practising were not practising in any deeper sense than by habit (only two subjects were very actively practising). Thirty two (46%) reported being nominal, weak or disillusioned with their old religion. Sixteen (23%) had no religion or were not interested in religion at all. And 14 (20%) were involved with a religious movement prior to conversion (see table 4.2a). (In fact, 20 (29%) were involved in new religious movements, but 6 left these movements long before their conversion). For a significant number (29%) of converts' rejection of the faith of their parents or culture did not imply a rejection of religion in general or loss of belief in God since they proceeded to explore other religious alternatives following their initial

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<sup>1</sup> Recruitment or sampling methods in other studies to which comparisons were made can be seen in Appendix F

<sup>2</sup> P. Brierley (ed), *UK Christian Handbook*, cited by K. Thompson, 1988: 224, see also Hunter, 1985: xi

rejection of a particular faith (see table 4 3 for new religious movements involved) As for "belief in God", 58 (83%) reported that they believed in God, 9 (13%) lost their belief in God, while 3 (4%) were not sure if they believed or not (see table 4 2b)

Table 4 2a Religious affiliation before conversion (n=70)

practising religion of origin	8 (11%)
nominal/weak/disillusioned	32 (46%)
no religion/not interested	16 (23%)
involved with a NRM	14 (20%)

Table 4 2b Belief in God prior to conversion (n=70)

believed in God	58 (83%)
lost belief in God	9 (13%)
not sure	3 (4%)

Table 4 3 Religion or religious group involved before conversion other than religion of origin

Buddhism	10 (5)*
Divine Light Mission	3
Hare Krishna	2
Hinduism	3 (2)
Rajneesh	2 (1)
Subud	2 (1)
Taoism	1 (1)
Zen-Buddhism	2

total 20 (29%)

\* (Numbers in brackets indicate the number of subjects who were involved with more than one group)

According to previous religious affiliations and belief in God prior to conversion, and what conversion meant for these people in terms of these areas, they may be classified into three groups

(a) Those who had no religious commitment for a long time or described themselves as nominal in their religion of origin People who fell into this group formed the vast majority (75%) of the sample For them conversion meant a religious intensification, not through the religion of childhood, but through a different religion It was returning to a religious life So their change fit the definition of conversion by William James (1962 194) who defined it as "the process, gradual

or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities " Before conversion, religion for them was something called Christianity or Judaism Consider the case of Rachel "I didn't have a belief in Christianity or any other religion, but I had a belief in God and life after death and I knew there are reasons for our being here " Laura also lost her belief in her religion, but never doubted the existence of God

" I never sort of doubted the existence of God It was rather sort of the doctrinal differences between different thesis, that's what I had to work out But there was a time when I became extremely disillusioned with Christianity for several reasons And it was at that time that it was sort of fading in my life I did want something else, I didn't want just to live without a religion And I think it was around that time I found out about Islam and as one was sort of fading while the other one was growing over a period of a few months "

(b) Those who described themselves as religious for a long period of time, but became disillusioned later on and were on the brink of losing their belief in their religion prior to conversion Around 12 percent of the sample fell into this group Consider the case of Adam who was brought up as a very strong Catholic He loved his religion and wanted to become a priest He was always horrified by the prospect of not attending church He said "If my brother, for example, didn't wish to go to church, there was always a big argument " Adam's ambition to become a priest was even noticed by the local bishop who came out to visit his parents and suggested that he should carry on studying religion When he was 17, before he went to university, Adam's ambition somewhat faded He felt very deeply about social issues which was actually a part of wanting to become a priest, because he had some notion of being involved in the "Third World" and doing missionary work in Africa At university his life changed In his first year he felt very insecure and he devoted himself to the football team His social life was dictated by that, parties and being in the bar most evenings In his second year Adam changed quite a lot when the Pope paid a visit to England The Pope's visit gave him a chance to think and he sort of converted to his old faith Then he went to Rome on an architectural course and stayed in Vatican city for a while He was much more idealistic at this time and joined different groups in his university town which gave domestic help to the elderly Yet, Adam admits, since he began university he had come under the influence of Socialism due to his idealism for helping the underprivileged, although he never formally joined a socialist group He then rebelled against his parents' conservatism and had endless arguments with his father about "how life could be improved without Capitalism" By this stage he had begun to hate the Western way of life for being so entrenched in Capitalism and he came to believe that Christianity was an emotional response to life "For example," he said, "I would go to church on a Sunday and feel very high emotionally, but then I would come away and there wouldn't be anything during the week to keep me going I didn't have strong guidance "

After his first degree Adam went to a different University to do a diploma in economics. Here there were a lot of Muslims on his maths course. By that time he had stopped practising Christianity and felt very much disillusioned, and therefore was vulnerable to any influence. The Muslim students on the same course had a big impact on him. He was very impressed by Muslims during the fasting month. He said "They were fasting whole days and still doing exams, they did as well as anybody else. They had a very great dignity which I really respected. Above all, they had a great love for their religion which I had never had for my faith. Even though I'd loved my faith it was a purely internal thing. I could never display to other people." So it was not long before Adam made up his mind to convert to Islam. His conversion was brought on as a result of his distaste of Capitalism and thereby western way of life rather than his theological disillusionment with Christianity. He is now among the few converts in the sample who have changed the way they dress, due to their reaction towards the western way of life.

(c) Those who lost belief in God after rejecting their religion. For them conversion meant finding God again. Around 13 percent fell into this category. Leonard said "When I was much younger, 13-14, I was very much interested in religion. But when I went to university I lost my religion all together. I became totally disillusioned and I shut off all belief in God completely." Jason gave a similar account "To me Islam is like finding God again. With Islam I am back in contact directly with God, whereas over the last 20 years I haven't really. It is also reconfirming or strengthening my moral and ethical outlook on life."

The accounts given by those interviewed suggest that the effect of religion on society, and the prevalence of religious practices are diminishing. The church seems to be losing its authority over people. A review of the past and present state of Christian religion in Britain and the West examines these ideas.

## **2- Modern Western Culture: Is it post-Christian?**

Until modern times the formative tradition of Western culture has been Christian, but the impact of Christianity on Western culture is no longer what it used to be (Vahanian, 1967, 152, 229). The fundamentals of modern western culture, especially in Britain, are said to be post-Christian, because modern culture is gradually losing the marks of that Christianity which brought it into being and shaped it (Gilbert, 1980 ix, Vahanian, 1966 98, Vahanian, 1967 139, 228). This does not mean that Christianity has become irrelevant, but it has become marginal for many people. To think and act in secular terms and even be indifferent to religion has become the norm. Some members of a post-Christian society continue to see Christianity as indispensable to their lives, but they find themselves in the minority in terms of social life and culture. The relationship

between the state and the church in Britain in the past was close (Bossy, 1985 153) On the eve of Britain's industrialisation and modernisation Anglicanism remained a powerful element in the political, social and legal structures of the society (Gay, 1971 64ff, Gilbert, 1976 4-7, Gilbert, 1980 70), but in the twentieth century this close relationship has gradually diminished (Hastings, 1986 663-4)

The primary historical context of modern British Christianity has been the emergence of an essentially secular culture Like other societies in the industrial world, the growth of social structures, settlement patterns and life-styles has given birth to a secular culture (Gilbert, 1980 xiv) The industrial revolution led to the emergence of distinctively 'modern' types of culture and social structure Human values and attitudes to the world were bound to change in response to this development (Perkin, 1969 160-175, Gilbert, 1980 22) In the history of secularisation the Reformation played an important role Protestantism was an important facet of the conditions which hastened the transition from medieval Christendom to the more secular environment of Enlightenment Europe The Reformation reimposed upon Europeans a distinction between Christianity and culture which resulted in making religiosity a private, voluntary, individual matter This meant, on the popular front, turning collective Christians into individual ones (Bossy, 1970 62, Gilbert, 1980 27)

Modernisation began with industrialisation in the 18th century which provided jobs that meant leaving a rural life for the cities In the course of these important transitions, the cultural system was transformed too, bringing breakdowns in traditional values and beliefs These cultural changes can be seen as an inevitable effect of economic growth (Thompson, 1967, 97, Baumeister, 1986 67) It was then feared that people would lose morality and virtue if Christianity failed, since Christianity was perceived as the source of moral standards (Meyer, 1976 65-6, 70-3, Howe, 1976 21-2) In the nineteenth century the West and Britain, in particular, witnessed a breakdown in the network of culture, institutions, and tradition that society had used to furnish meaning to individual life (Clark, 1962 32-40)

In modern western culture religion has been relegated to the edges of modern consciousness The social structure has transformed from largely rural to predominantly urban settlement patterns which has resulted in disappearance of traditional community life, the rise of class structures as primary social barriers, and changes in social control, education, and family life (Howe, 1976 9-10, Gilbert, 1980 66, 69) Social status in the twentieth century is a blend of education, occupation, and income Privacy is highly valued The role of the family, which in the past placed children in adult roles and was the connection between the individual and society has

greatly diminished in this regard. As society became more complex, offered choices, and embodied change, the traditional models stopped providing all the answers (Baumeister, 1986 77-8, 87, 104, 144). Consequently, the individual in advanced societies became a member of an increasingly secular society (Gilbert, 1980 107).

To examine the current situation of Christianity in Britain, it is reported that around five percent of the population is explicitly atheist and just over ten percent accept the entire literal truth of the Bible (Martin, 1967 54). About 76 percent of the nominally Christian adults believe in God, 57 percent in heaven, and 27 percent in hell. Only 23 percent attend church at least once a month, and membership of a church is confined to about 15 percent of adults. Mainstream churches show signs of decline in almost all respects (Beckford, 1991 182). The 1987/88 edition of the UK Christian handbook reveals a continuing decline in the major Christian churches' active membership with a loss of half a million members in the previous five years. However, there are also instances of religious revivalism. Religion, with its emphasis on personal relationships and transcendent values, still offers fulfilment to people who, in Wilson's terms, experience personal discontents with the increasingly impersonal, large-scale, societally-organised social system (Wilson, 1991, 202).

The decline of religion in Britain has been interpreted by some observers in terms of secularisation. To them secularisation is the dominant feature of contemporary religious change in the West (Wilson, 1976 85, Martin, 1967 100). By this they mean a continual reduction in the influence of religion on society and people's lives as a result of the rise of science and technology, the replacement of village life by city life challenging the place and role of religion in society. Wilson sees secularisation as a process of structural change in society. He defines secularisation as a "process by which religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance, and become marginal to the operation of the social system. According to Wilson, as a consequence of secularisation, religion in advanced societies has lost its control over social activities which once it exercised. Various institutional orders of social life (the economy, the polity, juridical institutions, education, etc.) is no more under the control of religion (Wilson, 1991 196).

The rise of science and technology also brought "individualism" which became a characteristic of Western civilisation. Religion may not make sense in the modern world. Therefore, technology's children today may not be all that ready to accept their parentage, and in a quest for identity they may rebel against their computerised heritage, against the "Enlightenment" that locked them into a rigid objectivism, scientism, and rationalism (Wright,

1982 180) In his book, *Identity Cultural Change and Struggle for Self*, Baumeister (1986 145) discusses how individualistic values and collective life came to contradict one another in the twentieth century West

"The spread of urban, industrial bureaucratic life and development of a consumer economy have resulted in the "mass society" with its collective behavior patterns. The individual lives in the midst of society and is totally dependent on it. Society provides the individual with a means of livelihood, information, food and clothing, entertainment, and so forth. But society refuses to provide a meaning for life other than the system of extrinsic rewards (as in earning lots of money). If the individual is at all sensitive, he or she feels that society is indifferent to his or her fate."

Sociologists, like Berger (1969 133) and Wilson (1991 207), illustrate that in this process sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols, and all forms of social world activities which have previously been motivated by secularisation and religion have become less and less significant. Eventually, religion lost its connection with the everyday world. It is believed that the present upsurge of "new religions" and the explosion of exotic new sects are themselves a manifestation of this ongoing secularisation.

So in Britain religion has become a compartmentalised marginal item in the society which caused the clergy's loss of status and power (Wilson, 1976 86ff). However, as Martin (1967) points out, the majority of people still retain central Christian beliefs and go to church occasionally. Although committed religious people are a small percentage, there are many more who are nominally Christians, though it probably has little affect on their lives (Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi, 1975 14-5). Religion has become what people believe, not what they do. One of the interviewees, Alan, gives a critique of English religion which is in tune with these assertions:

"English people, we have this ability to sort of believe in God, but not do anything about it. We are sitting on the fence really as regards to being actually active in the religion and demonstrating our love and worship for Allah. Because in Christianity you don't need to do that. You can just be intellectual about it. It can be all in your head. And you don't really even need to go to church. English people are not very bad to their neighbours, they don't steal things, so they live quite good lives, but they don't actually actively worship Allah which Islam teaches. That is the difference."

Wilson (1976 19-21), discussing the effects of secularisation in modern society illustrates how moral control by religion has given way to modern society's mechanical and bureaucratic devices, and how everyday life has been demoralised as human involvement in many areas of activity is replaced by technical controls. Arguing the decreasing role of the church in England Wilson asserts that "people have what might be called a 'post office' conception of the Church, a service facility that is well distributed over the land area of the country to be available when needed."

Conversion for some of the interviewees meant turning from a secular culture to a non-secular or less secular one. Their accounts concentrated on their attraction to Muslim societies where religion was a fundamental part of the culture. Their attraction to the impact of religion in Muslims' lives was an important factor in their conversion. Therefore, it will be helpful to examine the current situation of the culture of Muslim societies in general and in particular their differences from secularised western societies.

Unlike industrialised Western countries which are said to be living in a post-Christian era, in Muslim countries religion was less eroded by secularisation, and their culture remained Islamic. In his book, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, Gellner writes how secularism could not gain ground in Islamic civilisation.

"At the end of the Middle Ages, the old World contained four major civilizations. Of these, three are now, in one measure or another, secularized. Christian doctrine is bowdlerized by its own theologians, and deep, literal conviction is not conspicuous by its presence. In the Sinitic World a secular faith has become formally established and its religious predecessors disavowed. In the Indian World a state and the elite are neutral vis-a-vis what is a pervasive folk religion, even if practices such as astrology continue to be widespread. But in one of four civilizations, the Islamic, the situation is altogether different." (Gellner, 1992: 5-6)

Gellner cites a few reasons why Islamic culture was less secularised. *First*, he says, society was endowed with both a fundamental and concrete law, each in its way entrenched, and usable by its members as a yardstick for legitimate government. *Second*, in Islamic culture church/state dualism, which would cause alienation between the community and the state, never emerged. *Third*, in Islam there is a theoretical absence of clergy. No distinct sacramental status separates the preacher and or the leader of the ritual from the laity. Such a person is not a different kind of social being and Muslim theology is in this sense egalitarian (Gellner, 1992: 7-9).

Modernisation in Muslim countries did not culminate in a widespread religious lukewarmness and secularisation. It may not have eroded religious commitment in general. Although modernisation and secularisation have taken place to varying degrees in Muslim countries (for example, Turkey is more secularised than Algeria) and affected religious practices, the traditional faith remains intact and Islam still exists today as a living culture. Religion has always played a big role in maintaining moral and social solidarity in the community (Dawson, 1949: 53, Hitti, 1970: 183, Robinson, 1974: 177-8). It is worth noting that not all Islamic countries are identical in terms of having a less or more secular state. The Islamic fundamentalism movements towards more secular states could be seen as parallel to a number of revivalistic movements in Christianity which have occurred from time to time.



The interviewees' accounts suggest that the oversecularisation led them to seek for an alternative way of life. They believed that Islam gave them a practical means of getting closer to God, living a good life, and getting peace in "this secular" environment. They became interested in Islam in the first place because they felt that Islam had strong clear values on things they felt concerned about, not just the abuse of environment, but even things like homosexuality. Their revolt was not always directed against religious beliefs, but against certain practices legitimised by religion, such as homosexuality no longer being a sin. Richard expressed how he felt before and how Islam helps him now in this environment:

"In this society Islam helps me not to sink into quite deep depression because of the political or economical circumstances. I can see how the earlier saints whether Christian or Muslim could actually progress so high. It gives one a code of conduct which has become virtually lost from contemporaries and younger generations. I think this is a feature of Islam. It requires from people outward manifestation. Unfortunately, Christianity has fallen away so tragically and dramatically. People no longer have the habit. Churches have a huge responsibility in this. And I think if churches had been stronger when I was growing up, maybe I wouldn't have become a Muslim. It is certainly significant now that church gives no clear cut lead on moral issues."

While giving their accounts of their previous life the converts interviewed strongly emphasised that they felt a need for a religion whereby they could orient their everyday life, and they chose Islam because "it is not a compartmentalised religion confined to certain areas". They felt that something was missing, and that was the influence of religion in their lives. Before coming to Islam they started criticising the existing culture and began having certain affinities and world views closer to that of Islam which eventually made a possible correlation between their views and Islam, and this facilitated their conversion to Islam. Alan recollected that he wanted to be restricted in the moral sense rather than being a free man in a free society. "When I was looking for a faith I met Rajneesh people. They said, 'You should come to India and you can do anything you want.' That's not anything worthwhile. If you can do anything you want, what is the point of it?" Jane's experience of the existing culture was similar. "There is a lot of confusion in our culture because it is based on material values. And although the church and Christianity exists formally, it doesn't have any answers to present-day questions that satisfy people. It hasn't got much spirituality." It must be underlined here that these comparisons made by the current group of converts seem to represent the views of uncommitted individuals in the previous religion who chose to be committed in the new faith.

Some of those who were involved or became interested in new religions, over a quarter (29%) of the sample, were in search of an alternative to the secular way of life with a strong reaction to the materialistic and secularistic perspective of society. Garry for example, became a

Zen-Buddhist in the university when he found that spirituality was lacking in the teaching system. Yet Garry found Zen-Buddhism monastic, not encompassing the social dimension of life. He said "It could answer personal questions, but it couldn't answer global questions." The interviewees were also asked the question "Why is it that, you reckon, some people are moving towards new religious movements?" They unanimously agreed that "people feel spiritually and intellectually unfulfilled, they are fed up with materialistic perspectives of life and they want to escape from the sheer materialism of life." In fact, what they recounted on new religious movements does not contradict the sociologists' accounts of the decline of liberal Protestantism. They argue that "the defectors from liberal churches do not embrace secular humanism, but that they may eventually be drawn to a more traditional faith." (Wallis and Bruce, 1986: 49). However, it is worth noting that only a minority of people seem to respond to new religious movements and other world religions. The majority is normally drawn back into their religion of origin.

To conclude then, the accounts given by those interviewed suggest that in general they have not achieved a religious identity since society has failed to create a social nexus for strong religious identification. For them, the identity label as Christian or Jew was no more than a passive acceptance of a social convention, and as this label was imposed from outside it did not lead to real ego-involvement.

### **3- Socio-demographic Factors**

The converts who participated in this study have a good educational background and qualifications. As table 4.4a shows, 60 percent had at least a bachelor's degree. Indeed, 20 percent had advanced graduate degrees. They tended to come from the middle class section of the society. 46 (66%) associated themselves with the middle class, while 24 (34%) identified with the working class. Significantly, none came from the upper class (see table 4.4b). They seem to have had a wide range of occupations, from taxi drivers to university lecturers. Many of them appear to have attained successful positions in various professional fields such as teaching, journalism and engineering. 6 were enrolled in higher education, 2 were unemployed, and 6 women preferred to be a housewife to look after their children, although they had good job prospects. Of the 70 converts, 50 (71.4%) are males and 20 (28.6%) are females. As for marital status, 40 people were single at the time of conversion, 23 were married or engaged (14 to Muslims, and 9 to non-Muslims), and 7 were divorcees.

Table 4 4a Levels of completed education (n=70)

Less than college	28 (40%)
College (BA/BSc)	28 (40%)
Master degree (MA/MSc)	9 (13%)
PhD	5 (7%)

Table 4 4b Social class (n=70)

Working class	24 (34%)
Lower middle class	8 (11%)
Middle class	32 (46%)
Upper middle class	6 (9%)
Upper class	0 (0%)

## B: IMMEDIATE ANTECEDENTS OF CONVERSION

A conversion experience does not just happen. It is the result of a complex process. One important issue which concerns social scientists as well as religionists is the cause of religious conversion. Conventional social science turns to arguments concerning individual or collective stress, while religious tradition suggests a wider range of circumstances through which a person's sense of ultimate reality shifts from one to another (see Heinch, 1977). Most studies of conversion have emphasised social and psychological variables to explain why certain individuals are drawn to a movement and under what conditions they become actual group members (Harrison, 1974, Greil 1977, Ebaugh and Vaughn, 1984). The assumption in these models is that all converts go through the same, or similar, processes. Both emotional and cognitive factors have been proposed in the socio-psychological literature to account for the experience of religious conversion. As mentioned in the previous chapter the psychodynamic approach to conversion purports that converts experience increased emotional upheaval throughout their childhood and in the period preceding conversion. Although some proponents of this psychodynamic approach emphasise the possible integrative and adaptive consequences of this experience, all trace its origin to childhood conflicts which have been stirred anew prior to conversion (Salzman, 1953, Christensen, 1963, Allison, 1969). The cognitive approach emphasises the pertinence of cognitive factors in precipitating the change of beliefs conversion entails. According to the cognitive approach conversion is a conscious cognitive quest for clear and comprehensive understanding of reality rather than a struggle with personal stress. Proponents of the cognitive approach have adopted a more humanistic perspective that allows for an acting and conscious human agent. This contrasts with the passive psychodynamic approach (see Richardson 1985 166-7). Jung broke dramatically with Freud and claimed that religion can often help people integrate their lives. Jung's best known book, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, illustrates his more positive "active agency" view. The work of Allport, *The individual and His Religion*, also tends towards this different view, as does the works of Viktor Frankl, whose *Man's Search for Meaning* and *The Will to Meaning* involve a rejection of Freudian dominated psychodynamic perspectives.

In order to test the presence or absence of emotional turmoil, or personal stress and cognitive or existential crisis, the two-year period preceding conversion was examined. Now these two will be analysed respectively. It must be stated here that in these analyses the features reported by those converts interviewed will be described without any detailed comparison with other Muslims.

## **1- Emotional Antecedents**

Emotional turmoil or conflict that is experienced prior to conversion can arise from various sources, which may include the perception of childhood relationships with one's parents and any traumatic events or stressful circumstances. Conversion may occur after periods of emotional confusion and disturbance. Family stress often becomes a factor in causing such anxiety. Having reviewed the lives of twelve historic converts like Pascal, Luther, and Augustine, Krailsheimer (1980) found that most had lives marked by tensions or imbalance in family relationships.

A significant number of the testimonials in the present sample included accounts of troubled lives before entrance into Islam. Nearly half of the sample (48.6%) had preconversion lives which were judged to contain emotional distresses. For them this period of their lives seems to have led them to look for something. For one fifth of the sample the emotional turmoil that had characterised their descriptions of their childhood and adolescence was also apparent in the immediate antecedents to the conversion experience. As discussed earlier their unhappiness was, in most cases, caused by parental marriages which either ended up in divorce or nearly broke up, and they described these as the major trauma of their lives (see table 4.5). Because of unhappy or unstable childhood or adolescence, these people described considerable distress during the two-year period prior to their conversion.

The perceived instability of the social world is believed by Dollah (1979: 48-9) to be a necessary condition for conversion. The individual takes for granted the reality of the social world around him until something comes to disturb or challenge this assumption. Instability is frequently affected by thought provoking literature, or through new experiences and by finding new alternatives. Separation or isolation of an individual from his fellow man in the social world could also lead to instability of his world view. Death is the most extreme type of separation of an individual from his person of importance. Another example of separation is a broken marriage. A divorced person may lose his identity and meaning in life. His future becomes uncertain. So all these problems make him restless and unhappy about the existing social world. Finally, the world view and particularly his identity in life begins to gradually break down. Thirteen (18.6%) of the 70 subjects were divorced or had a broken relationship (8 divorced and 5 had a broken relationship) before conversion, and this caused emotional turmoil and anxiety for a long time. Nine (12.8%) had had one of their parents die before they were 16 years of age. Five (7.1%) had had a serious illness or accident that left them either disabled or stricken, and one subject (1.4%) had had the experience of imprisonment for a long time (see table 4.5). In 8 cases (11.4%) the emotional

distress was reported as serious, and they sought therapy at some point in their lives for a variety of symptoms

Table 4 5 Reported traumatic events\* in life before conversion

Divorced	8 (11.4%)
Parents divorced	11 (16%)**
Parents nearly broke up before the subject was 16 and this caused an unstable childhood	3 (4.2%)
One of the parents died before the subject was 16	9 (13%)***
Serious illness or accident that left the subject either disabled or stricken	5 (7%)
A broken relationship	5 (7%)
Imprisonment	1 (1.4%)

total 42 (60%)

\* Some experienced more than one event which may be described as traumatic. In this case the event which the subject described as the most important was taken into account

\*\* One subject was adopted, never knowing her parents

\*\*\* One subject's mother was killed when the subject was 30 years of age

It has been suggested that a single emotional "trauma" or shock may affect an individual and may bring personality change or a conversion experience (Clark, 1958: 215). This does not mean that an emotional turmoil or trauma is enough for conversion or personality change, but that the effective crisis that causes turmoil after the incident could simply cause a process which leads to conversion or personality change. However, the final decision for conversion may depend on intellectual elements. Some cases of conversions in the present sample seem to apply to the above description. For example, Charlie said that leaving Christianity was an emotional experience, but embracing Islam was an intellectual process. Charlie went through a distressing period when his marriage broke up. In general, Charlie had had a religious upbringing through his father. He had attended Salvation Army Sunday School, and been to church regularly. In 1973, aged 25, Charlie went to France and became involved with a charity for handicapped children run by Roman Catholics and worked for that charity for two years. During his stay in France he was only exposed to Roman Catholic belief and he continued attending Roman Catholic Church right the way through until 1983. That year Charlie got divorced.

"When the marriage broke up it was particularly dirty, a lot of recriminations, a lot of both sides saying they are in the right. And I found that a lot of the Christian values that I've been taught to believe such as when you marry you marry for life weren't put into practice by Christians and my wife committed adultery. I took some action against the man involved which resulted in my going into prison for a year. And my friends, who were Christians, on my side condemned me rather than her and they said divorce was the best thing."

Then Charlie began looking for ideas and philosophies, some sort of guide, although not necessarily a religion. He read books on Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. He said that his choice had been Islam because he had found it not that far from Christian belief. He found the Islamic viewpoint on adultery or marriage/divorce law closer to his own views. Now Charlie's perception of this society is one of repugnance.

"I am critical of Western society in its hypocrisy, the fact that the society claims to subscribe to a set of values, but it doesn't necessarily really follow the logical process of subscribing to those values. For example, in a society that values family, it makes divorce easy. In a society which values life, it makes abortion easy."

The vast majority of the subjects who went through emotional distress said that they were grateful to God to have experienced such distressful incidences because it was these events that had sparked them to think about religion. Timothy, who lost his business and had a marriage breakup, commented:

"So at the time it was exceedingly traumatic. I'm very grateful to God for this experience because I think then my life really began to forget about God. I was becoming trapped in the material world in the notion of wealth and position and all this sort of thing. So I felt almost as if God said, 'That's not what you are born for. That was not the purpose for you.' I think He forced me to look at things. Now that was the time I began to question."

Lofland and Stark (1965: 864) suggest that a state of acutely-felt tension or frustration is a necessary predisposing condition for conversion. Snow and Phillips' (1980: 433) study of Nichiren Shoshu seems to corroborate this expectation. Their informants characterised their preparticipation life situations in terms of various problems and tensions. Sixty-eight percent of their sample, for example, indicated that prior to or at the same time as encountering Nichiren Shoshu they were experiencing one or more spiritual problems, such as meaninglessness, a lack of direction or purpose, or a sense of powerlessness. Snow and Phillips retrospectively categorised five personal problems which were referred to as characterising life situations prior to conversion:

- 1- Problems coded as "spiritual" include meaninglessness, lack of direction and purpose, a sense of powerlessness, poor self-image (68%)
- 2- Problems coded as "interpersonal" include marital problems, child rearing problems, parental problems, and other relational problems (48%)
- 3- Problems coded as "character" include drugs, alcohol, self-centeredness, and various personality problems such as uncontrollable temper (52%)
- 4- Problems coded as "material" include unemployment, job dissatisfaction, finances, and school-related problems (43%)
- 5- Problems coded as "physical" include headaches, nervousness, chronic illness, obesity, lack of energy, and so on (30%)

When looking through the preconversion period in the present sample to find out how many of Snow and Phillips' categories apply, it was apparent that they were present in varying degrees. The first three problems seemed to dominate the last two. Thirty four subjects (48.6%) reported feelings of aimlessness, lack of purpose or direction and meaning, incompleteness, etc. Nineteen (27.1%) reported problems coded as "interpersonal" including marital, parental and other relational problems. Six (8.6%) reported drug-use, and 7 (10%) reported excessive alcohol use in the two-year period preceding their conversion. Eight (11.4%) reported material problems like unemployment, job dissatisfaction, and school-related problems. Five (7.1%) experienced problems coded as "physical" like chronic illness or lack of energy.

Though some evidence was found in favour of the Snow and Phillips' findings, the material from the sample studied does not strongly support their proposal relating conversion experience to emotional turmoil or personal distress experienced in the immediate preconversion period. Only the finding on problems coded as "spiritual" seems to lend support to Snow and Phillips' findings. Spiritual crisis in many cases was caused by existential or cognitive questions, as will be illustrated below. These findings, and the general atmosphere of the interviews suggest that conversions did not occur as a direct result of the emotional turmoil or personal distress. It may be associated with conversion, but it is not necessarily a predisposing condition. In the preconvert, there may be an unconscious conflict, and a psychological set, but these factors, alone, in many cases, may not be enough. There must at the same time be an immediate factor which acts as a catalyst. This catalyst is likely to be cognitive and existential questions.

## **2- Cognitive Antecedents**

The two-year period preceding conversion was also examined for the presence or absence of a cognitive quest. Cognitive quests which were present tended to be concerned with social, and moral issues, religious doubts, and existential concerns which covered questions like "what is the meaning and purpose of my life?", "how does one deal with the fact that one is going to die?", and "what should one do about one's shortcomings?"

Thirty three (47.1%) reported preoccupation with cognitive concerns. As stated above 34 (48.6%) reported feelings of aimlessness, lack of purpose or direction and meaning, incompleteness, etc., which mainly arose out of cognitive and existential concerns. Alan, who described himself as a seeker for the ultimate reality said

"When I was a young man of 18-19 I was what other people called a 'hippie'. For me it was a fun. I didn't need to go out and take life very seriously. I took things like painting and playing music and having fun very seriously. Later on I started feeling incomplete. I found that I was reading a lot



of books about things that suggested a greater reality than all I could see about me. Because what I could see about me was quite small. And I had been doing things and experimenting with mind expanding drugs with which I'd actually seen that there was an awful lot to reality. I was aware that there was much much bigger things going on and I wanted to know what those things were."

Tim was also in search of a religion that would satisfy him cognitively

"I was looking for a religion and an explanation, a way of life, a philosophy that was explaining and giving meaning to life and answering questions that I felt very fundamental about myself, about existence, about creation, etc. I studied philosophy in the university and this brought me into the domain of religion and belief, knowledge and so on. I think inevitably it is all entwined. I was not satisfied with the answers this society provided. I remember when I was a child being on one occasion about this question of death and asking my father about it and he tried his best to explain it in his language how in fact life goes on beyond death. But it was a very inadequate explanation from my point of view, it didn't satisfy me at all. I think I struggled on the level of reasoning."

The stories of some converts interviewed suggest that an active, continuous and relentless search for meaningful answers to questions about the nature of life and death preceded their conversion. They had been asking questions about the meaning and purpose of human life and they had been compelled to reexamine and reevaluate their previous life-styles. These people believe that the cognitive problems that used to bother them are met by Islam because they felt that it offered them "a philosophy of life, it proclaimed the responsibility of man, a future life, and a day of judgement." Islamic emphasis on life after death and the Day of Judgement, for example, motivated Janet's conversion.

"When I was at secondary school there was a girl in my class. Her parents were religious. Since my parents didn't talk about religion I used to ask questions to that girl. I wanted to have that faith as she had. I used to have dreams about nothingness after death. You have nothing, nothing and then just sinking in this pit. I thought there must be something after death, there must be life, you can't just die. My mum would say, "We'll just get eaten up by worms, that's it, nothing else. So I used to ask my friend how she had this faith. I wanted to believe in something."

Janet had this niggling question in her mind over the years and accepted Islam after she was introduced to it by her Muslim friends in the university. Anne's conversion may also be traced back to her concern with life after death which came after she had feelings of guilt due to a "sinful" and "troubled" life. Anne was born to a Catholic family in a small town. When she was 18 her parents sent her to university in London, though she felt she was not prepared to stay at the university in London. When she got there she could not believe that "all the girls were so outrageous and they all had so many boy friends and they were all drinking." Anne became totally caught in this scene, and ended up very unhappy. To block out her unhappiness she drank more and more. Her performance at university was also badly affected. In the end, she was so depressed that she went to a psychotherapist. However, he was unable to help her at all "because the

psychotherapist didn't believe in God and a lot of my problems came from the Catholic Church which was telling me to be good and I couldn't reconcile it with society And, of course, in Catholicism you just go straight to Hell for some of the things you do wrong and there is nothing you can do about it really " In a discotheque, Anne met a man whose mother was Italian and his father Turkish This man was not practising any religion at all, but he suggested that Anne read the Qur'ān Anne bought a Qur'ān and started reading When she read the verse which said "Things of this world take your attention until you come to the grave " Anne was deeply impressed and thought it was talking about her life Then she thought she had to find out about life after death and spent a large amount of time reading books on other religions like Buddhism and Hinduism "I was reading and I was also talking to everyone to find out why we are here It was the realisation that we are all going to die which made me feel that I had to find out what this life is about and what happens after death And I wasn't satisfied with any other religion but Islam " Towards the end of the interview Anne did not hesitate to blame her parents and the society for her "troubled" life "My parents brought me up to believe in God and then told me to dress up nicely, but threw me into the middle of a corrupt society and expected me to find my own husband which was such a pressure, especially while alcoholism was going around " As Anne's story shows, many of the converts interviewed were discontent with their life-style preceding their conversion and they wanted to change Anthony's conversion to Islam occurred after a long time of disillusionment with his life-style

"I used to drink a lot and a lot of parties used to go on Normally, I imagined I had a very good time, but it was not really that satisfying, and I felt that there must be something much more significant or meaningful, something that could be more satisfying than what I was doing at that stage My disillusionment with my life-style was growing, and stemming from this I was interested in the big questions of life I suppose I felt if I had a better idea of what my own life was all about, perhaps I'd have a better idea of what I should be doing in it And perhaps as a result of that I looked at other religions, certainly not with any intention of becoming religious at all, but only really because the questions I was becoming interested in were basically questions that were addressed by religions about who we are and what life was all about, and what kind of purposes we should have in life "

Conversion experience, in many interviewees' cases, was a search for meaning They reexamined the ground rules dictated by their culture They were discontented with ambiguities in their life-styles and society, and, therefore, were preoccupied with what was right or wrong, with universal questions of meaning Their accounts centred on urgent spiritual needs rooted in the particular circumstances of their lives, and they described the fulfilment of these needs as the primary consequence of their religious conversion This pattern emerges clearly in the case of Nick whose first contact with Islam came about when he was abroad Nick was a student nurse and did a casualty course and then went abroad to Libya and Iran, staying a year in both places His

experiences with Muslims abroad were not really of any consequence and he was not too impressed, and it never occurred to him that he would eventually become a Muslim. About a year after he came back from Libya Nick had a serious illness.

"The diagnosis wasn't serious, but before it was diagnosed it was expected I had cancer and I knew from my experience, because I was working as a nurse, that would give me six months to live. So I spent about four days not knowing. That affected, of course, my decision to look for a religion. I was already looking for something by then, but that experience made it more urgent. After the illness, although I knew it wasn't anything that was going to kill me, I realised that you could be killed tomorrow and hoped to gain something after death. Then I thought I should do something. I was working with Christian nurses who wanted to go and work in Africa and be missionaries. I couldn't agree with them at all, but I envied their faith because they felt so certain. But I knew that if I followed what they believe, I wouldn't be really truthful because I couldn't accept it. I had a great respect for Buddhism because it is a passive religion, but I didn't really believe in its cosmology. So I knew this wasn't the truth as I perceived it."

Then Nick went to Kenya through the Red Cross on a famine relief programme as the team leader. He found the scene of famine very disturbing and distressing, and he saw a lot of deaths there. This raised the question of death and the meaning of life in his mind. This time he had a much stronger desire to have a faith. In Nairobi he bought a translation of the Qur'ān and in reading it he felt that it gave the right answer to his existential quest. "The more I read the more I felt that I was a Muslim and I took the *shahādah* when I was 30. It wasn't a question of choice like "Oh, Yes, I will be a Muslim." I felt "Oh, Yes, this is what I believe, therefore I am a Muslim."

Modern Western man appears to be in existential trouble. Many of the great thinkers of recent times believe that as a people Westerners are beginning to lose a firm hold on their values, their spiritual grounding and meaning for existence. Nick said:

"In the West, we are living in the Post-Enlightenment period. We have environmental problems, AIDS and so many things, and scientists are not coming up with any solutions. I think the quality of life isn't improving, people are becoming more and more disillusioned, life is becoming more insecure for people. I remember when I went to Iran I was living in a rural community and the most striking thing I noticed was that the people seemed more content. I still feel strongly that the more simple the life the more content the people. If you look at this society, it is more and more complex, more problems and it's less content."

What Nick feels regarding discontentment with life in urbanised society has also been a theme for Muslim thinkers in their criticism of modern Western society. In his book, *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, S. H. Nasr (1968: 17) writes:

"Today, almost everyone living in the urbanized centres of the Western world feels intuitively a lack of something in life. This is due directly to the creation of an artificial environment from which nature has been excluded to the greatest possible extent. Even the religious man in such circumstances has lost the sense of the spiritual significance of nature. The domain of nature has

become a 'thing' devoid of meaning, Furthermore, even this type of secularised and urbanized existence is itself threatened, through the very domination of nature that has made it possible, so that the crisis brought about through the encounter of man and nature and the application of the modern sciences of nature to technology has become a matter of common concern "

Viktor Frankl (1967, 1972, 1988a, 1988b) maintains that in this century man's feeling of despair has become ubiquitous. He refers to this condition as the "existential vacuum" which is spiritual distress. It is characterised by feelings of emptiness, boredom, valuelessness, and meaninglessness. Frankl believes that people have cognitive needs to perceive wholeness, pattern, purpose, or meaning in the stimuli that confront them. It may, therefore, be concluded that adopting an encompassing religious world view would be a way of meeting this need. Without some moral and evaluative pattern, the world may be experienced as chaotic and meaningless, which is not an experience conducive to personal happiness. Jason's account of his experience echoes the existential vacuum described by Frankl.

"The 1960s and 1970s generally were a time when most young people who had any kind of education were looking for an alternative and most of my contemporaries were seriously looking around for a radical alternative, for a new way of being. And I suppose my looking around was prompted by that. I would now interpret it as being a spiritual quest for the ultimate reality. I didn't know what it was, but certainly it was something that everybody was looking for, something more real. Later on, as I progressed some of them have progressed in the direction which they've chosen. They realised what it was. And all the social movements of this age including social or political, they were actually sublimations of the religious urge."

When Lofland and Stark in 1965 argued that a religious problem-solving perspective is a precondition to conversion, they pointed to the fact that the converts' previous cognitive orientations will make them more or less likely to accept the ideology of a particular group. In the following years a number of writers (Greil, 1977, Lynch, 1977, Baer, 1978, Greil and Rudy, 1984, Richardson, 1985, Gartrell and Shannon, 1985) on religious conversion have argued that this is the case and suggested that predispositions are an important factor to consider in attempting to understand the conversion process. In short, this view asserts that people join a religious movement whose ideologies make sense to them. In his study of conversion to a Pentecostal sect, Heinrich (1977: 674-5) challenged explanations of conversions that focus on emotional stress or past socialisation and called for a study of conversion as an existential quest. Heinrich suggested that conversion entails a change of explanatory schemes of "root reality" similar to the gestalt shifts. He concluded that links between the content of a new vision and adherents' prior experiences are crucial. "the new 'reality' used by converts should speak directly to the problem they have encountered and should explain it more successfully than its earlier competitor." Greil (1977: 119-120) argued that the search for a new perspective is guided by the individual's "stock

of knowledge" (what is known to be true) and "cognitive style" (characteristic means of accepting and validating new propositions) Cognitive theory suggests that those whose identities have been spoiled become "seekers" who search for a perspective that can restore meaning to the world Batson and Ventis (1982 82-7), maintained that religious experience involves cognitive restructuring to deal with one or more existential questions They argued that creative problem-solving may serve as a model for understanding religious experience and distinguished four stages of problem-solving regarding the religious quest (1) there are persistent but unsuccessful attempts to solve the problem by using the old structure, (2) encountering repeated failures, the person then gives up the active search for solutions, (3) there is a sudden emergence of a new organisation, a switch of gestalt, that enables a different view of the problem and, consequently, its resolution, (4) there is a testing and verification of the new view The four-stage model, suggested by Batson and Ventis, seems to apply to the case of many converts involved in this study, who had been in search for solutions to existential queries The first stage refers to the "existential crisis," which fails to find solutions to existential queries In the second stage, the convert gives up of his quest in despair In the third, he gains a religious revelation that supplies a sense of resolution In the final stage, he applies the new vision to behaviour

To conclude, emotional and cognitive concerns seem to be equal in characterising the two year period preceding conversion Thirty three (47.1%) of the 70 reported specific concerns that could be designated as cognitive or existential and 34 (48.6%) reported emotional distress during the two year period prior to conversion As this finding illustrates, selecting one factor as being relevant and eliminating the other as irrelevant to conversion would be premature They both seem to be precursors of conversion

The course that the preconversion period takes in many cases is that the emotional turmoil or personal distress of the individual leads him to a stage where he develops cognitive concerns For example, Anthony, whose case was presented earlier, was in turmoil because of his life-style and he reached a stage where he started asking questions about the meaning of life He was looking for a way of shedding his old life-style He believed that taking up a religion which had a strong and decisive framework towards things that were causing him unhappiness would help him in that direction To cite another example, Raymond was still feeling distressed when he became a Muslim at the age of 18 This was due to the fact that he had been born illegitimate, and had been brought up without his father Raymond said "When I observed how strong the family structure of Islam was through my Muslim friends in the university, I decided to take up this religion" Raymond thought that he would not have suffered if his parents had adopted the Islamic way with regard to male-female relationships

Even in cases where the religious conceptions of Islam or its expression of the ultimate meaning of man's existence were not a primary element leading to its adoption, once the religion had been accepted, new concepts penetrated consciously or unconsciously through religious action. Those who had instability, a turbulent background, and an unstable world view stated that Islam seemed to promise a release from anxiety if they transferred to it. However, they also pronounced that it provided answers as to why they had been in turmoil in the first place.

To sum up, the fact that nearly half of the present sample reported a turbulent background and that even some of those who developed cognitive concerns referred to a troubled life before conversion leads us to emphasise that emotional concerns were important antecedents of conversion among those interviewed. However, this may not be so for all native-British converts to Islam, as the present sample was not drawn at random.

## C: CONVERSION MOTIFS

In some types of religious conversion belief emerges out of interaction with members of a religious movement (Snow and Phillips, 1980), while in others outcomes of evaluating cognitions such as intellectual satisfaction with an experimental orientation precede it (Straus, 1979 163) Stark and Bainbridge (1980b 125-6) purported that religious organisations offer both tangible social and material rewards, as well as rewarding beliefs and ideas. Investigations of religious conversion brought to light several conversion "patterns" or "motifs" of the experience. Lofland and Skonovd (1981) offered six types of conversion (Intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalistic, and coercive) characterising each using five independent elements: (1) degree of social pressure, (2) temporal duration, (3) level of affective arousal, (4) affective tone of conversion experience, and (5) the belief-participation sequence. They characterised each conversion motif by a particular profile in terms of these variables. They also noted that these major types occur at different times and with different frequencies, depending on the social and historical content. For example, in recent times intellectual and experimental conversions have increased while the mystical and the revivalistic type have declined. Reviewing the Lofland-Skonovd's conversion motifs Robbins (1988 71) concludes that "in 'advanced' Western society, intellectual and experimental conversions may be increasing while revivalist conversion motifs have declined." Now the six conversion motifs outlined by Lofland and Skonovd will be reviewed and their applicability to the present sample will be examined.

In the first, the **intellectual** mode of conversion, the individual becomes acquainted with alternative ideologies and ways of life by individual, private investigation like reading books, watching television, and other impersonal ways. Though some individuals convert themselves in isolation from any actual interaction with devotees of the respective religion, in intellectual mode the individual is still likely to be socially involved with members of the new religion. However, there is little or no external social pressure, the process does not take long, and a reasonably high level of belief is attained prior to actual conversion.

The second, the **mystical** mode of conversion is characterised by high subjective intensity and trauma. It has alternative names such as "Damascus Road," "Pauline," "evangelical," and "born again." The experience can not be expressed in logical and coherent terms. In this conversion mode there is little or no immediate social pressure upon the convert, he is even likely to be alone at the time of the actual event. The critical period of the conversion is quite brief, although a period of stress preceding the critical event may stretch back some days or weeks. The level of emotional arousal is extremely high, and this is followed by active intensification of belief.

In the third, the **experimental** conversion, the potential convert takes an experimental "show me" attitude and is ready to give the process a try. In this mode, genuine conversion comes later on. First, the prospective convert participates in the group's ritual and organisational activities and learns to act like a convert. It involves relatively low degrees of social pressure to participate since the recruit takes on a "try it out" posture. The actual transformation of identity, behaviour, and world view takes place over a relatively prolonged period and does not appear to be accompanied by high levels of emotional arousal in most instances. Belief arises out of participation.

In the fourth, the **affectional** mode, personal attachments or strong liking for practising believers is central to the conversion process. Though social pressure is present, it functions more as a "support" and an attraction, rather than as an "inducement". The process is relatively prolonged. Even if the central experience is affection, the ordinary level of emotional arousal seems more in the range of "medium" intensity, and as in experimental conversions belief arises out of participation.

The fifth, **revivalist** conversion refers to managed or manipulated ecstatic arousal in a group or collective context which has a transforming effect on the individual. The best known revivalist conversion is the style of Billy Graham's meetings. The revivalist style seems to have declined, but NRMs like the Unification Church or Hare Krishna appear to have resurrected the revivalist experience. In the revivalist conversion motif recruits are overwhelmed initially by waves of intense sentiment orchestrated by the movement. It involves intense social pressure and is of a fairly short duration. There is a high level of affective arousal, and belief comes after participation.

The sixth, **coercive** or brain-washing "takes place only in extremely rare and special circumstances, but it has been alleged by some to be prevalent among the new religions of the Western world" (Lofland and Skonovd, 1981: 381). The two keys of the coercive motif are the compulsion of an individual and the confession of guilt or acceptance of an ideological system by the individual. Lofland and Skonovd acknowledged that revivalist conversion may provide a setting in which "social-psychological coercion" may arise. Therefore, there are crossovers between revivalist and coercive conversion. Revivalist and coercive conversion differ in terms of longer duration of the latter, but share the high levels of social pressure and affective arousal and belief arises out of participation.

When Lofland-Skonovd's finding of six conversion patterns is applied to the present sample it indicates that interviewees experienced one of the three conversion motifs: intellectual, affectional and experimental (see table 4.6). The three motifs, affectional (which may be defined



"example and imitation"), intellectual (which may be called "response to teaching"), and experimental (which may be defined "trying it out") are dominant. However, mystical and coercive motifs are also found though the latter is extremely rare. Only 3 (4.3%) subjects were judged to have gone through the coercive motif, but in all of these 3 cases there was an affectional motif involved as well. The revivalist motif in which the individual is emotionally stimulated at a high level does not occur in the present sample.

Table 4.6 Conversion motifs (patterns)

<b>Motifs</b>	<b>total =70</b>	<b>male=50</b>	<b>female=20</b>
Intellectual	50 (71%)	38 (76%)	12 (60%)
Mystical	10 (14%)	9 (18%)	1 (5%)
Experimental	42 (60%)	28 (56%)	14 (70%)
Affectional	46 (66%)	28 (56%)	18 (90%)
Coercive	3 (4.3%)	3 (6%)	0 (0%)

To find out the presence/absence of conversion patterns two people (the author and a psychologist) independently assessed the motifs for each subject using Lofland and Skonovd's criteria, since where decisions are being taken about presence/absence of a particular feature in behaviour/discourse, etc. one person's opinion may not be totally reliable. 85.2 percent overall agreement was reached, which was considered satisfactory. In order to emphasise the fact that conversions typically emerged by going through many motifs rather than one the judges pointed out every motif operational in the process rather than just the primary one.

The intellectual motif was found in 50 (71%) cases. Other motifs like affectional and experimental have also played a role in their conversion, but these subjects said that their initial scepticism about their previous beliefs, and their intellectual discovery of Islam preceded their conversion. The data analysis found the relation between the presence/absence of intellectual motifs and cognitive concerns before conversion to be significant. Of the 33 who reported cognitive concerns before conversion, 28 were judged to have gone through an intellectual motif ( $\chi^2$  with continuity correction = 4.336, df=1,  $p < .05$ ). Other variables, education, gender, and age of conversion were not found statistically significant.

The affectional motif was present in 46 (66%) people. Their personal contact with Muslim friends or acquaintances whose opinions or behaviours are valued played a role in their conversion. Emily recollected how she was impressed by the Muslim family that she knew. "At that time I was seeing this Muslim family and I was watching and listening to what they said and

what they did I was trying to see how they were different They were very sincere in their faith and they were friendly in this materialistic and selfish society That really helped towards my conversion " Raymond talked of the family aspect of Islam

"My initial contact with Islam came through Muslim friends at the university I didn't ask them any question about Islam and they rarely mentioned it It only came up in general conversation But the family structure attracted me The women want to be woman, not man, and the men go off to work and the women remain woman in the home Very nice Yes, I like this They don't try to get drunk all night They have moral values, they don't have sex before marriage with as many people as possible This is the kind of woman I want to marry I could see this directly from the way they live their life-styles You can see the women are not running off with anyone "

Some were affected by the Islamic concept of brotherhood Simon said

"Muslims have a very strong bond because we share an ideology It is not like, for example, I have a friend we go to a football match, when the match is over our bond is finished, but with Islam it is everything Even if we don't like each other as individuals we still have that bond that holds us together "

The second conversion experience of Malcolm X provides a unique example as to how affection can cause a conversion experience Malcolm X converted to the heterodox Black Muslim Movement first, but when he visited Mecca for pilgrimage a few years later he gained new insights that led him to realise that Islam transcends the sectarian character of the Black Muslim Movement and thereby converted to the *ummah* (community) of orthodox Islam He declared his second conversion in a letter from Mecca to his friend back in the United States

"You may be shocked by these words coming from me But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to re-arrange much of my thought-patterns previously held, and to *toss aside* some of my previous conclusions Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and overwhelming spirit of true brotherhood as is practised by people of all colours and races here in this Holy Land, the home of Abraham, Muhammad, and all the other prophets of the Holy Scriptures For the past week, I have been utterly speechless and spell-bound by the graciousness I see displayed all around me by people of *all colors* America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem . During the past eleven days here in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept in the same bed (or in the same rug) - while praying to the *same God* - with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of the blue, whose hair was the blondest of the blond, and whose skin was the whitest of the white And in the *words* and in the *actions* and in the *deeds* of the "white" Muslims, I felt the same sincerity that I felt among the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan, and Ghana " (X, Malcolm, 1964 340-1, *italics in original*, for a discussion over Malcolm X' conversion see Gallagher, 1990)

Denis has had an experience reminiscent of that of Malcolm X, which prompted his interest in Islam Denis met a couple of Muslim students from South Africa in London and he travelled with them and they became friends They invited him to go for a holiday in South Africa

" So while I was there they said "Come and see the mosque" and I went along I saw South African and Indian Muslims praying side by side And I thought this was unusual and strange in South Africa, seeing the races together like this So when I came back I got a few books on Islam including the Qur'ān and started reading and wanted to know what it is special about Islam that brings the races together whereas at that time the Christian church was very segregated "

Some interviewees were deeply affected and thereby attracted through their visit to Muslim countries Jason recollected how he was affected by the extent of religious influence in people's lives when he spent some time in Egypt

"I did a lot of travelling around Egypt and just talked to the people What surprised me was the extent to which so many people adhere to religion It struck me because over here, although we are all Christians we don't really adhere to Christian teachings In Egypt you get into a car and the taxi driver has a copy of the Qur'ān This was very shocking for someone like myself who lives in a country where people are not that dedicated towards a particular religion "

Tim talked about how he was affected by Muslims when he saw that they always mentioned the divine names in their daily conversations like *bismillah* (in the name of Allah) before they did things, and *salamalaikum* (peace be upon you) to one another when they met

Those who were married to a Muslim before their conversion were more likely to go through the affectional motif Fourteen (20%) subjects were married to a Muslim when they converted Thirteen of them were judged to have gone through the affectional motif The data analysis found the relation between the affectional motif and being married to a Muslim at the time of the conversion to be significant ( $\chi^2$  with continuity correction = 4.316,  $df=1$ ,  $p< .05$ ) The affectional motif was also significantly related to gender Women were more likely to go through affectional motifs than men 18 (90%) women as against 28 (56%) men were judged to have gone through the affectional motif ( $\chi^2$  with continuity correction = 5.898,  $df=1$ ,  $p< .02$ ) Other expected relations between affection, reported emotional turmoil before conversion, and age of conversion were found to be non-significant

No matter what reasons or motivating factors they had for their conversion, the majority went through a period of experimentation during the process Forty two (60%) came to Islam after studying or spending a considerable amount of time among Muslim friends, families, or in Muslim countries While some spent some time in Muslim lands and knew quite a lot about Islam, some had first hand experience of Muslims through their friends over here As well as getting information and impressions from Muslims and reading about Islam, they also visited mosques, attended meetings and even joined the prayers to see and try it out for themselves Jason said "

So through talking to people I learned about the way Muslims live I already understood about the faith, it wasn't that strange to me when I converted "

The expected association between the experimental motif and being married to a Muslim at the time of conversion was found to be non-significant. Other expected associations regarding gender were also found to be non-significant.

Ten (14%) subjects (9 men and 1 woman) reported having a mystical experience before they decided to embrace Islam. Kathleen, who converted one year after she married her Muslim husband, had a mystical experience which made her feel "complete". According to Kathleen, her husband was not a practising Muslim when they got married, but he turned to religion some time after their marriage. Until then she was not very much interested in Islam. After her husband changed, she felt deep down that she had to change and come to terms with it. But she did not know where to turn, whether she should follow her husband or return to her own religion. One day she went to church and prayed to God saying "Look I am here, tell me what is the truth, guide me, and I promise I will do it." The answer came the following day:

"I had a very strong dream. I saw myself in the middle of a field. It was very dark and there was so much rain. And I was crying, feeling that all the pain in this world was with me. Then I heard a voice that said, 'Oh, human beings, why are you so bad, making me very sad? I have created you because I love you. Why are you doing this to me?'" I woke up finding myself crying. So what happened that night, in my opinion, was I was washed off my sins of the past."

When Kathleen had this dream it was the time of the fasting month of *Ramadan*, and she decided to do the fasting with her husband despite not being a Muslim. The last day of the *Ramadan*, Kathleen had another experience which made her decide to become a Muslim.

"I woke up at six o'clock in the morning and I heard the *adhan* (the call for prayer) in X where there is no mosque around. So that was it. I said, 'This is for me, this is a sign.' I woke my husband up and said that I wanted to become a Muslim. That was the happiest time of my life because you feel you've done it, and you are one person, no more conflicts. Because the conflict is constantly within you unless you find God."

Although more men (18%) than women (5%) have gone through the mystical conversion, the relationship between gender and mystical motif was non-significant. The data analysis suggests that there is a significant relationship between conversion through Sufism and mystical experience (see chapter VI, section E). It is also found that the mystical motif was associated with a previous involvement with new religious movements. Of the 20 who reported previous involvement with new religious movements, 6 were judged as having gone through the mystical motif ( $\chi^2$  with continuity correction = 3.993,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Six of the 10 who reported the mystical motif also reported previous drug use, but the correlation between reported previous drug use and mystical motif was statistically non-significant.

The convert may undergo two or more types of conversion motifs at the same time or at different times during the process leading up to actual conversion. However, an overview of the lifespan and the accounts of conversion experiences give clues about the primary conversion motif. As the conversion accounts presented throughout the thesis indicate, the pattern of conversion in the present sample, in terms of conversion motifs seems to be a mixture of more than one motif. That is to say, the converts interviewed appear to have been under the effect of two or three motifs rather than just one. Only a few were judged to have gone through only one motif. To illustrate the fact that they have gone through more than one motif the process that David went through can be examined. Throughout his life, even when he was a child David had always had certain questions like "Why are we here?" He said "As I got to be in my teens I could see there was a lot of injustices in the world and I was looking for answers." As an extension of these worries in his youth David was quite active in various socialist groups and also groups concerned with racism or similar issues. But "quite quickly", David said, he saw the shortcomings in some of the left-wing ideologies and groups.

" For example, I could see the spreading of Marxism and Leninism in countries, say, such as China, was a form of imperialism in the sense that it is a form of dissimulation of Western cultures and Western values which is materialistic amongst people who are Westerners. So I've come to view it as more of a left-wing politics and I gradually changed my view rather than thinking that they were seeking justice in the world. I've come to see it as like a way of expanding the hegemony of Western materialistic thought. Then I gradually drifted away from what was at first a very conventional form of left-wing ideology and I started to read some of the French post-Marxists particularly who extended their criticism to the underlying foundations of Western society. And this in turn led me to read many different authors who concerned themselves with the political and social history of the West who were becoming increasingly critical of Westernism. Particularly there was a group of American Anthropologists who were concerned with real value which they termed the "primitive" and their perception was very much that Western progress was not progress."

This search for the "primitive" led David to read the Bible for the first time ever. He was very struck by some of the older books that the Bible had in Genesis. He said

"I was looking for something more fundamentally human, that's where this thing ties in with "primitive". Because the society we are living in now is very alienated, one human being is very alienated from another. We tend to get to know people through various things, through literature or something else. And I found this directness and this kind of mentality in the Bible. It wasn't really a religious reason that I started to read it. It was because it was simply a very ancient text and I was looking for this directness between human beings. Reading the Bible was like a new world to me because here was the understanding of revelation from God. It was wholly different to what I had experienced before which was a very intellectual and deductive way of looking at things."

From reading the Bible David started to read the Qur'ān. He began to acknowledge that the words of the Qur'ān were the words of God. He believed that in the Bible there were things which were undoubtedly the word of God, but there were certain things which were unacceptable, and

that the Bible had been compiled over a very long period of time. He believed that there was continuity between the revelations sent to Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. David admitted that this was a big step for him to take because he had been completely irreligious until then. At this stage David did not know any Muslims. Over a period while he was searching he increasingly had the desire to practise the religion, but he did not know how to, because he was so divorced from religion and religious experience. He gradually became more receptive to a way of thought which was religious. His internal inclination towards Islam soon turned into action when he decided to take up Islam when he was visiting a Muslim country as a tourist. At first glance, David's conversion appears to have been purely an intellectual one. Nevertheless, this is only one part of the story, as David concedes. While David had all these intellectual questions in his mind, his marriage was collapsing and in the end his wife left him. After she left David she started living with another man who beat her badly. David had to get involved, sometimes physically, and he was very much caught in the middle, because his daughter had remained with his wife. David described this period of his life as "dark" and "period of perpetual personal crisis" and added that it certainly played a part in his journey to Islam. As well as these intellectual yearnings he desperately wanted to find something, a code of behaviour, to live by. He said "As the momentum of events continued to build up, it became increasingly obvious that I was going to become a Muslim to have solidity in life. Anyway, there wasn't really any alternative." David recollected the time when he decided to convert while visiting a Muslim country. He was sitting in a park looking back over his life and the various chaotic events that had overtaken him. When he had gathered his thoughts he took stock of his life and decided that there was no alternative but to convert to Islam to escape from his past and start a new life.

Poston's (1988: 432)<sup>3</sup> study of 70 American and European converts to Islam seems to lend support to the present findings regarding the conversion motifs. For Poston's subjects response to teaching was the chief motivating factor which the overwhelming majority found significant. Fifty-two (74.3%) of Poston's subjects mentioned either aspects of the teachings of Islam in general or some specific teaching/s of the religion as being instrumental in their decision to convert, while 42 (60%) mentioned specific individuals or groups which had influenced them in their decision. In the light of these findings Poston (1988: 433) concluded that "the moratorium period between rejection of the parental and/or cultural religion and acceptance of Islam provided a time for careful consideration upon the precepts of a variety of alternatives. In a number of cases various teachings were examined comparatively and those of Islam were considered to be

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<sup>3</sup> Poston recruited his subjects through Muslim organisations and also used written accounts of the converts to Islam in Muslim periodicals, booklets, and books. Only 12 of Poston's subjects were recruited through Muslim organisations who filled in a questionnaire.

qualitatively superior " Gartrell and Shannon (1985 32), studying conversion to the Divine Light Mission in America, examined the "rational choice" approach of conversion to new religious movements in which conversion is seen as a function of recruits' evaluation of the social and cognitive outcomes of converting relative to not converting They based their axioms on established rational choice, balance, and networks principles to derive propositions that explain key features of Lofland-Skonovd's conversion motifs They grouped two major classes of rewards corresponding to key dimensions along which Lofland-Skonovd's conversion motifs vary social rewards, and the rewards associated with evaluation of cognitions about the movement's beliefs and practices And their search led them to stress the compatibility of the "rational choice" approach to conversion (Gartrell and Shannon, 1985 44)

Apart from judging the conversion patterns that converts went through, each subject was also asked to identify the most motivating factor for their conversion As table 4 7 illustrates, response to the teachings of Islam with regard to religious beliefs, moral or social matters, and its spiritual aspect were the most motivating factors

Table 4 7 Most motivating factor in conversion process (n=70)

Emphasis on brotherhood, community, and friendliness	7 (10%)
Witnessing life of a Muslim and attraction to the culture	7 (10%)
Religious doctrines and teachings	19 (27%)
Moral ethical standards, social matters, and political ideology	19 (27%)
Spiritual, mystical aspect, or inexplicable religious experience	18 (26%)

Self-regarding motives like "wanting the approval of others" are not significant "Social pressure and urging" is not the case for the present sample However, there may be some cases where a non-Muslim partner might have felt psychological pressure from their Muslim partner for conversion to Islam, though none described such a pressure Equally, being attracted and impressed by the witness of a Muslim might have encouraged the convert to respond seeking approval of this highly esteemed Muslim Interpersonal bonds, including marriage, and social relationships seem to have played a significant role in the conversion process of those interviewed

Conversion is generally approached from four major perspectives The first sees conversion as the rapidation of growth which hastens, steps up, intensifies, normal growth The earliest proponents of this perspective were Hall (1920) and Starbuck (1911) Their concept of conversion was that conversion always results in growth towards maturity A second approach

sees conversion as the unification of a divided self. The first proponent of this approach was James (1892-1914) who defined conversion as "the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities." The implication of this approach is that the self, (as defined by self-psychology of personality, which refers to the person as a whole), is capable of being divided and being united. The self may be divided by conflicts, and conversion experience enables the self to overcome conflicts and it becomes unified again. A third idea sees conversion as a change of direction. It is characterised as a spiritual experience of transforming encounters with God, interpreting life as a pilgrimage of the spirit over the long pull of the years, as against the concept of conversion as being solely the first and "stamping" encounter with God at the conscious level. In this sense Clark (1958-1961) defined conversion as a "type of spiritual growth or development which involves an appreciable change of direction concerning religious ideas and behavior." Forth approach sees conversion as an act of surrender. The convert starts by suspending all previous notions, beliefs, values, and rethinks afresh the whole of life (see Oates, 1973: 95-103).

Traditionally conversion is basically classified into two major types, distinguished in terms of time and the different psychological processes involved. The two types can be termed the sudden, and the gradual. The former is experienced by only a minority of people (Starbuck, 1911, Pratt, 1948: 123, Clark, 1958: 190-1, Scobie, 1973: 265, Kildahl, 1977: 238-247, Thouless, 1979: 104, Spilka, et al, 1985: 205, Gillespie, 1991: 17-8). Although some sudden conversions have only the characteristics of sudden decisions, sudden conversions are characterised by three major distinguishing criteria. *First*, they are apparently passive, the convert suddenly feels in the grip of forces beyond himself. This "otherness" that confronts the person suddenly presents itself, often in a moment of crisis. *Second*, is the act of "surrendering" or giving into this "otherness". The person gives in or accepts this "otherness" rather than confronting it. *Third*, sudden conversions tend to be characterised by intense feelings of unworthiness, of sin, and of guilt.

Gradual conversions occur almost imperceptibly and probably cannot be typically related to a single "turning point in life", although like sudden conversions they result in a changed self. They have three major characteristics. *First*, they are characterised by an active search for meaning, and striving towards a solution to personal or collective problems. The convert is unlikely to experience an awareness of a force or otherness that initiates the conversion process at a precise time. *Second*, there is an absence of emotional crisis or feelings of guilt and sin. There are purposive goal directed efforts to create a new self. *Third*, gradual converts continually and



progressively deepen in a faith that they have cognitively assented to accept, rather than experiencing a sudden moment of surrender and acceptance of a new life. The precise moment of acceptance cannot be identified, but rather there is a gradual awareness that one is a different person. The following table shows the distinctions between sudden and gradual conversions (see Spilka, et al, 1985: 206)

<u>Sudden conversions</u>		<u>Gradual conversions</u>
Sudden awareness of "other"	versus	Gradual and increasing search for meaning or purpose
Predominance of negative emotions and feelings of sin and guilt	versus	Absence of emotions, especially intense feelings of sin and guilt
Passive act of surrendering to a faith perspective	versus	Active assent to a faith perspective

Brandon<sup>4</sup> defined three types of conversions: sudden, gradual, and unconscious, which show the various ways in which individuals adopt their religious beliefs. Studying 170 theological students, Scobie (1973: 265-271) investigated these three types of conversion within the Christian context. Scobie's research found the same three broad types of conversion: 34 (20%) sudden, 86 (50%) gradual, and 50 (30%) unconscious conversion experiences were reported.

Scobie's study revealed that among these three types, sudden conversion experience is the most distinctive one, having the following significant factors: (1) its suddenness, it occurred in a few months of time and provided a datable experience from which religious faith was seen to commence, (2) its unexpectedness, in general converts maintained that prior to the experience they had not been considering the implications of religious faith, (3) its emotional content, sudden conversion experiences were highly emotional for some subjects. But Scobie (1973: 266) described the major characteristics of the experience as suddenness and unexpectedness, rather than any emotional overtone.

The most common experience was gradual conversion which, unlike sudden conversion, was usually a slower process of religious development in which the person gradually adopted particular aspects of religious belief. It took place over a period of time, days, months, or years. The converts gradually moved from a position where they were rejecting Christianity as a whole, or some specific part of it, to a point of general acceptance.

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<sup>4</sup> O. Brandon, *Battle for the Soul: Aspects of Religious Conversion*, 1960, London: Hodder and Stroughton, cited by Scobie, (1973: 265)

In the third conversion type, Scobie described the process as unconscious, almost similar to the experience of a non-conversional group. It took place where a person is normally brought up in a Christian home, or under the direct influence of Christian people, and he cannot think of a time when he was not Christian or when he did not accept Christian belief in his life.

In the present sample, the sudden conversion experience, with the distinctive characteristics of suddenness, unexpectedness, and emotional content was found only in two cases (3%), with the sudden emotional content characteristics. Some emotional content was present in a few, especially in Sufi subjects' cases, but conversions were not necessarily a direct result of the emotional overtone. Their conversion experiences took months, and even years.

The unconscious conversion type would not seem to be applicable to the present sample, since they did experience a change, or at least they were not brought up in a committed Christian home, or under the direct influence of Christian people. However, the unconscious conversion type may be applicable to some life-long Muslims since the unconscious conversion type is more of a developmental or socialisation process. In this sense, Muslims (as Jews, Christians, etc.) who acquire their faith through parents, peers, and society are unconscious converts in Brandon's term. However, there is no available study which confirms that life-long Muslims experience this type of conversion. It was beyond the scope of this study to include a group of those born into Muslim families, where unconscious conversions may occur.

The gradual type of conversion is what seems to characterise the conversion processes of the vast majority of the people involved in this study. The only way individuals can acquire a belief system which is not derivable from parents, peers, and society is by way of a sudden or gradual conversion. So new religious movements or religions moving into new areas depend on sudden or gradual conversion process to acquire new members. Sixty eight (97%) of the 70 experienced gradual conversion. Their experiences took a long period, moving from being nominal in a former religion to commitment in the new one by varying degrees. They did not relate their experiences to a single turning point. They told of going through a progressive process, actively searching for meaning and striving towards a solution to personal or collective problems. In this process there was a gradual awareness that they were becoming a different person. Poston's study of 70 American and European converts to Islam seems to accord with the findings of the present study. Sixty nine conversions in Poston's sample were categorised as "process" as opposed to "spontaneous" experiences. Poston (1989: 418) concluded that

" In most cases there was no crisis, no sense of desperation driving individuals to seek religious solutions to their difficulties. There was no occurrence of what Conway and Siegelman call snapping, since there were no "emotionally-charged mental conflicts needing urgent resolutions. Their conversion experiences were the end result of a long process of seeking, a deliberate choice made after careful examination and consideration of alternatives "

## **D: SOCIAL INFLUENCE IN THE PROCESS OF CONVERSION AND THE CONVERSION PROCESS MODEL**

In this section the influence of social relationships and interpersonal bonds (including marriage) in the conversion process will be examined. The Lofland-Stark's process model will be reviewed in the light of the evidence provided by the current group of converts to Islam.

### **1- The Convert as a Social type**

Social influence theories suggest that the range of perspectives used by close associates affects the persuasiveness of a new view of reality. Increased contact with a devout follower of the new faith increases the likelihood of conversion. A gradual shift of beliefs may be the result of a change in social environment which introduces the person to new reference groups (Ullman, 1989: 81). Nevertheless, an individual must already be oriented towards a religious quest at the time of social contact (Heinrich, 1977: 673). If the individual is not already a religious seeker, or if he is attached to a religion, such contact may not be sufficient for conversion.

Studies of religious conversion to NRMs seem to have applied two theoretical approaches in order to ascertain what is most influential in the conversion process. The *first* is the **deprivation-ideological** appeal point of view (Catton, 1957, Balch and Taylor, 1977, Anthony, et al, 1977, Richardson and Stewart, 1977, Lynch, 1977, Baer, 1978) which hypothesises that people are deprived (socially, psychologically, physically, etc.) and ideologically predisposed to accept a cult or a sect's message. This approach claims that people do not join a group unless something has had an adverse effect on them, and thus cults and sects tend to recruit people who suffer from some variety of deprivation. People who feel dissatisfied with their current life-style, perspective, or belief system look somewhere else. Lofland and Stark (1965: 864), for example, hypothesised that people must experience enduring and acutely felt tensions before they will join a cult. The *second* approach may be called the **"social networks"** point of view (Stark and Bainbridge, 1980a, Snow and Machalek, 1983, Long and Hadden, 1983) which emphasises that interpersonal bonds between members of a group and potential recruits are essential elements in the process. The first approach claims that groups reward the members and make deprivations more bearable. The second approach puts interpersonal relations at the centre of the recruitment process and argues that faith constitutes conformity to the religious outlook of one's intimates, and membership spreads through social networks. Studies from social network

point of view suggest that the "social network" approach is applicable not merely to sects (Gerlach and Hine, 1968, Richardson and Stewart, 1977) and cults (Lynch, 1977), but also to conventional faiths (Harrison, 1974, Herrich, 1977, Stark and Bainbridge, 1980a ) as well. The "social network" theory does not completely deny deprivation theory. It states that deprivations and social problems are facilitating factors of conversion, but the crucial step in joining a group is the development of strong social ties with group members (see Stark and Bainbridge, 1980a: 1380).

Although both approaches emphasise the different nature of elements and factors in the conversion process, there is nothing contradictory about them. Even those who question the centrality of deprivation admit that it must at least be included as a condition "enabling" or "facilitating" conversion. This research suggests that both seem obvious requirements of any adequate theory. As the accounts of the interviewees portray, the potential convert may have ethical, psychic, or social deprivation in their background and at the same time they may have a social relationship with a Muslim associate. The study of conversion to Ananda by Nordquist (1978: 87), in fact, lends support to the proposition that both approaches are important. Nordquist's questionnaire study of 28 Ananda members revealed that they were overwhelmingly characterised by "social withdrawal or introversion" prior to joining Ananda. Presumably, social isolation was one of the deprivations that caused these people to seek a religious answer. Yet, Nordquist also found out that an overall majority of the converts reported that "fellowship with other devotees" was an important factor in keeping them in Ananda.

The converts involved in this study entered into the fold of Islam by various means and for a variety of reasons. Some accepted it after studying it for a long time, and some entered it in order to be able to marry a Muslim, or after marrying a Muslim. Whatever the reasons and purposes of their choice to convert, it seldom occurred without human contact. All but 9 converts had been in contact with Muslims in one way or another for a long period of time before they made their decision. Their conversion was often the result of interpersonal relationships with Muslims.

The interviewees were asked how they first made contact with Islam, whether any family members, a spouse or friends belonged to Islam, or if any other means like literature or travel to a Muslim country was applicable (see table 4.8). Sixteen (23%) people's first contact with Islam was through literature. Micheal's first contact came about when he was doing a part time course in art and architecture. Part of the course involved Islamic art, and that set him off reading introductory books on Islam and also books on Islamic spirituality. Literature there also covered reading the Qur'ān. Tracy, who became a Muslim at the age of 49, read the Qur'ān before she knew much

about Islam, and was thus convinced of its truth Tracy, whose marriage was on the verge of break-up when she read the Qur'ān, was impressed by the verses concerning woman

"It was the Qur'ān that really made me Muslim The verses related to woman, the way it speaks of woman as having the same right as man in marriage struck me It says "man and woman were created equal with different roles" It is not necessary for a woman to put up with a bad marriage Because Islam says that "both of you should be equally happy" Both have equal responsibility and he should treat you with respect "

Table 4 8 First contact with Islam (n=70)

Travel to a Muslim country	16 (23%)
Conversation with a Muslim/s	26 (37%)
Reading literature	16 (23%)
Male-female relationship	10 (14%)
Family members or relatives	2 (3%)

The overwhelming majority of the converts interviewed speak of a gradual process involving conversation with Muslims, reading of the Qur'ān, and/or other Islamic literature, and in some cases journeying to Muslim lands Sixteen (23%) people were first introduced to Islam when they travelled to a Muslim country Twenty six (37%) reported they first learned about Islam through conversations with Muslims Ten (14%) came into contact with Islam through male-female relationships, (this included 3 female converts who followed their English husband's conversion), while 2 had one of their family members or relatives converted to Islam

In some cases infatuation occurs after a more or less chance meeting The individual meets someone who "seems to be a nice guy " After a while, the individual discovers that some of his friend's ideas are a little unusual, but upon discussing the issues further with his friend he comes to see that they are "pretty reasonable after all " Sometimes new perspectives come to those who were not even looking for them, and sometimes conversion is experienced via new acquaintances and as the general acceptance of the beliefs of these acquaintances Alan and his wife came to Islam after they observed a new neighbour

"A couple moved to a farm just near where we were and we got to know them very well The man was a wimp and the wife tried to dominate the man And the man went to London and stayed there for sometime When the man came back he was Muslim He came back a man He was no longer a wimp Islam changed him He had come back a man with purpose And his wife followed him into Islam We noticed Islam in this man and we were convinced by him"

However, adult identity is very resistant to change The mere presence of direct or indirect forms of social influence is hardly enough to make a convert The convert is hardly a passive

recipient of social manipulation. As Alan reported above, converts' accounts show that their conversion was not a result of manipulation or of group influence, but the influence of an individual Muslim or the possibility that the religion may provide the opportunity of a new start in life.

Gradual conversions do not come in a flash. Long months of study and reasoning are necessary, often aided by Muslim friends. With different people it can take varying lengths of time, depending on personality or even age. The accounts of the converts suggest that younger people arrived much more quickly at the decision to convert than older people did. Victor accepted Islam when he was 57. He had lived in India for ten years where he came across Muslims, but he needed to come back to England and meet Muslims over here to make his decision. The majority of the converts interviewed claimed to have made a calculated decision, consciously taking into account what they considered to be all the relevant details. They often spent a great deal of time weighing up the relative importance of all the pros and cons. Erick said "During the process I would describe myself as unsure, confused about some questions. It sort of evolved naturally, it was more like an evolution. I was not to commit myself till I was sure and perfectly satisfied." The converts gradually began practising Islam, in ways such as abstaining from pork and alcohol, learning ritual prayers, and thinking like a Muslim about the events going on around them. Nevertheless, the process preceding conversion sometimes involves scepticism. Anthony had some doubts, though he was motivated by the rationality of Islam.

"Everything made sense and was reasonable, everything added up, but there were one or two aspects of Islam which I couldn't quite understand at first. They were not fundamentally contradictory problems, they were problems which might have been correct or might have been wrong and so I took the attitude on these issues to accept them and believe them perhaps in the future. Of course, I can understand these much better now."

In sum, the accounts of the converts interviewed suggest that social relationship played a significant role in the conversion process. Contact with Muslims was a key element in their conversion.

## **2- Conversion Through Marriage**

After the immigration of Muslims in 1950s the marriage rate between Muslims and native British people began to increase throughout Britain. The rate of conversions to Islam also began to increase.<sup>5</sup> It has long been established that marital status bears a strong relationship to the

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<sup>5</sup> There are no available figures to indicate the rate of intermarriage between Muslims and non-Muslims in Britain. There are no available figures to show that conversions to Islam as a consequence of intermarriage are on the increase. Some studies suggest that conversions to Islam occur through

religious belief and practices of the individual (see Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi, 1975: 51). Many studies on religious conversion have shown that spouses are often instrumental in inducing the individual to convert (Salisbury, 1969, Mayer, 1987). For some converts involved in this study, marrying a spouse in the new faith seems to have been the primary motivation for their conversion. Perspectives are maintained by social relationships, when an individual's social relationships change, his perspectives are likely to change as well (Shibutani, 1955: 567). The conversion process then becomes a process of coming to accept the opinions of one's significant others who in this case are Muslims.

Fourteen<sup>6</sup> (20%) of the 70 interviewees were married or engaged (5 engaged) to a Muslim at the time of conversion. Of the 14, nine were female and 5 male. Five people (4 men, 1 woman) converted before marriage in order to be able to marry their future spouse. Nine (8 women and 1 man) converted after marriage. Three of the women followed their English husband's conversion to Islam, as Helen said: "My husband decided and I went along with him." Some candidates, however, are motivated by the desire to marry a Muslim rather than by conviction, as Jason admitted: "To be honest, I'm not quite sure which came first, my attraction to the girl because we were getting on very well, or my attraction to Islam. I think they both grew about the same time, they moved along with each other because we talked about Islam a lot." Though the initial impetus for conversion comes from the desire to marry a Muslim partner, it may later on develop as a sincere desire to embrace Islam. Martyn met his future wife in Egypt and they tentatively decided to get married. Martyn realised that there was no way a non-Muslim man could marry a Muslim woman, and that there was no way a Muslim woman could leave the country without the permission of her guardian. Yet he did not want to become a Muslim on paper because he believed that religion was something meaningful in itself rather than just a way of getting something else. He then came back to England and decided to study and learn more about Islam. Fiona also converted for the sake of marriage, but now she feels a strong Muslim. "My first contact with a Muslim came about when I coincidentally met my first husband in Italy where we both were on holiday. He was an Egyptian staying in London and he was not practising Islam at all. And through him I had contact with several Muslims. Some months after we first met we got married and I became Muslim in name for the sake of marriage." Fiona is now divorced from her Muslim husband, but she regards herself a better Muslim than her ex-husband.<sup>7</sup>

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marriage (see Ball, 1987, Nielsen, 1992). There are also no statistics on Muslims converting to Christianity or Judaism as a consequence of the faith of their partner.

<sup>6</sup> 9 Church of England and 5 Catholics.

<sup>7</sup> It is not the purpose of this thesis to explore the scale of conversion to Islam in Britain by marriage. However, it seems that there are people whose primary motive for conversion is to marry a Muslim.



Conversion overcomes the differences in religion, but does it really eliminate the differences of heritage and tradition between husband and wife in an intermarriage? Is conversion necessary to eliminate those differences? Since converts who are married to a Muslim live in Britain, generally not within a Muslim community, their attachment with Islamic tradition and heritage will be limited. It is not so important for the non-Muslim spouse to become an integrated part of the Muslim community as it would be in a Muslim country.

Each mixed marriage does in some degree represent a confrontation of two religious systems. In a study of the conversion phenomenon in mixed marriages between Protestants and Catholics, Salisbury (1969: 125-9) examined three areas, religious identification, sex roles, and social status, which seem influential in religious conversion in mixed marriages. Salisbury proposed that religious identification is more important for the Catholic spouse than Protestant, as the Catholic religious system is tighter and more closely integrated than the Protestant religious system.<sup>8</sup> So given this fact, Salisbury found Protestant spouses convert to their partner's faith at a higher rate than Catholics. Secondly, he found that because of the females' traditionally subordinate role, they convert more frequently than their husbands. Thirdly, females are more likely to convert to the husband's faith if the husband has professional social status.

Salisbury's first two findings apply to the present study in the cases where converts married Muslims. However, his third finding seems less relevant, since only one convert's spouse had a better social status than them at the time of conversion. Islam is one of the strictest religions in the world concerning mixed marriage. It does not tolerate mixed marriage with the exception that a Muslim man can marry a Christian or a Jew. Muslim women are not allowed to do so as it is normative and traditional that the man should be the head of the house. So in order that a Muslim woman may marry a non-Muslim man, be he a Christian or not, he must convert to Islam. The Islamic religious system seems to be a tighter system than that of Christianity, and powerful sanctions operate to hold the Muslim husband to his religious affiliation. So given a mixed marriage, the Muslim husband is more constrained than his non-Muslim wife regarding religious conversion. The Muslim husband's community is less likely to tolerate his conversion to another religion. Religious identification is an important feature of Muslim social relations and an important source of social location. This reality may play a significant role in conversion experiences as a result of mixed marriages between Muslims and Christians. The family-in-law and the new Muslim social environment of the non-Muslim wife may expect her to convert. Therefore she may look upon conversion as a necessary means of achieving complete social identification with her

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<sup>8</sup> Despite making this statement Salisbury did not control the level of commitment in Catholics and Protestants.

husband Furthermore, women are socialised towards "expressive" and "socio-emotional" roles more than men (Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi, 1975 78) The wife may, therefore, decide that in order to achieve a religiously homogeneous and harmonious family it is necessary to convert to Islam

Prior to conversion the partner may not be committed to a religion Of the 14 subjects, who were married or engaged to a Muslim at the time of conversion, only one reported practising their religion of origin prior to conversion One was involved with a new religious movement Two reported that they identified themselves with no religion, while 10 reported themselves as being nominal or weak in their religion One partner's conversion to the religion of the other sometimes may simply be for the sake of marriage and children On the part of the non-Muslim partner there might be a perceived need for family stability or religious homogeneity later in the marriage as the children pass from infancy to childhood Sarah's description of the process of her conversion hardly touches upon the meaning or the truth revealed in her new faith "I've never converted to Islam formally I just assumed it when my children reached the age of education I started taking them to the Mosque for classes in order that they may learn their religion Then I assumed it and took the *shahaḍah* " The interviewees who converted through marriage stated that their Muslim partners took Islam more seriously than the interviewees did their religion It is quite understandable that when a Muslim partner has a strong commitment, and the non-Muslim partner has a relatively weaker commitment, there is a strong probability that the latter will convert

Some of the nine people who converted after their marriage claimed that living with Muslims and discussing various religious problems with them convinced them of rationality and truth of Islam Debbie said "People probably would say that I changed my religion for my husband or they would say I fell madly in love with my husband But this is a real joke This is nothing to do with my husband " Sheila's account was similar

"After getting married I kept studying Islam So gradually I was turning to it He just brought books to me and I liked to read them He didn't make me Muslim, it came totally from me If he made me, I wouldn't People don't understand, especially when you say you are married to a Muslim They say, "Oh, yeah, it's your husband then " I can't understand because I know lots of them who are married and they haven't turned to it at all and the marriages are not very happy "

In the case of some women interviewees, further examination of their background reveals how much time and effort they invested in trying to understand Islam in order to convert Joining the new faith clearly held great rewards for these women, who might have otherwise lost the only stable relationship they had Many of these women were alienated from their family and had had a fragile and unstable identity throughout their adolescence and early adulthood Conversion for them meant regaining their identity, and achieving total independence from their parents Such a

case is present in Barbara's story. Barbara was born to a Roman Catholic family in London, with an Irish father and an English mother. When she was young she perceived her parents and Roman Catholics around her "hypocrites". She said "You go to the church, you sit there and be nice to each other. As soon as they get out the priest would be out in the pub along with my dad and along with everyone else's dad. And mums would go out on the street. I used to feel so sorry for them." She described her childhood as extremely unhappy because her parents always wanted to leave each other "fighting like cats and dogs". Because of her father, as a child Barbara vowed never to marry an Irish man or a Catholic. Her distaste grew further and she refused to make her 'confirmation' although she was always sent to Catholic schools. After she left secondary school she never cared about religion. However, she said, she "loved God and believed that Jesus existed." After she completely dissociated herself with her parents' religion Barbara felt in her heart there was something missing. She said "It sounds weird, but it is true. When you lose your religion yet you are still looking for something. But I wasn't actively going out and looking for something and I didn't try any other religion before." By that stage Hare Krishna people who ran a restaurant next to where Barbara was working had tried to convert her, but Barbara did not find anything interesting in them. When 18, Barbara met her present husband who used to work in the shop nearby.

"I didn't know he was Muslim until he mentioned his name. He liked me because I used to dress like a hermit and he kept asking me to go out, but I wouldn't go out with him. I was very happy as I was. I didn't want anyone else. That's why I wouldn't go out with him. But he kept pushing and pushing. Eventually, I said, "Yes," and I took my little sister with me to put him off. And we went into just the cafe beside. But he just liked me more because I took my sister with me. I couldn't believe it. If it was English or something they wouldn't like it. But I found out in Islam it is good to bring someone along. And the next time we went out I found out how nice he was and I really liked him. And we soon decided to get married. I know it sounds weird, but it's true. I did it out of something in me. Anyway, we got married and we didn't talk about religion. He didn't drink and smoke or anything like that. And I didn't touch any alcohol after I met him."

Six months after their marriage Barbara converted to Islam. She described the most motivating factor for her conversion as what she saw in her husband. "When I saw how good and how kind he was. Even if I cooked something and he didn't like it, okay, he wouldn't eat it all, but he would eat a bit of it. He cared about you. I think that comes from Islam." When I met Barbara she had been married for two years and she seemed to be very happy. She said that her parents were getting a divorce and she thanked God that she would not have to face what her parents were facing.

To conclude then, it has become clear that contact with a follower of the new faith increases the likelihood of conversion and is instrumental in the process. In general, conversions in the present sample did not occur without contact. However, it must be emphasised that

converts were often on a religious quest and were intellectually satisfied with the answers Islam had to offer. Social influence in the form of manipulation by groups was rarely involved, but individuals were impressed by the example of Muslims. In the case of the 14 interviewees marriage seems to have been the key element in their conversion. Some converted to Islam so that they would be able to marry their future (Muslim) spouse, while others converted after being influenced by their Muslim partners long after their marriage.

### **3- Certain Processes Involved in the Conversion Experiences of the Current Group of Converts**

Lofland and Stark (1965) presented an influential model of conversion based on their study of a Domsday Cult (pseudonym for Unification Church) which may be viewed as the beginning of socio-psychological studies of new religious movements. They described seven conditions emanating from the immediate circumstances of the person's life and the group process as determining conversion to deviant perspectives. According to them, for conversion, a person must (1) experience enduring, acutely felt tensions, (2) within a religious problem-solving perspective, (3) which leads him to define himself as a religious seeker, (4) encountering the [cult] at a turning point in life, (5) wherein an affective bond is formed or (preexists) with one or more converts, (6) where extra-cult attachments are absent or neutralised, and (7) where if he is to become a deployable agent, he is exposed to intensive interaction."

While critics disagree on the importance and sequential ordering of the seven steps in the Lofland-Stark model, there seems to be widespread agreement of the necessity and essential role of two steps in the model: formation of affective bonds and intensive interaction with group members (Lofland, 1977b, Snow and Phillips, 1980, Greil and Rudy, 1984, Ebaugh and Vaughn, 1984). The findings of Snow and Phillips (1980: 444) in their study of the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist movement in America supported Lofland and Stark's contention that preexisting friendship ties tend to be the primary avenue for recruitment of new members, rather than movement-specific or emergent relationships. In their study of three movements (Catholic Charismatics, Christian Scientists, and Bahai's) Ebaugh and Vaughn (1984: 148) concluded that friendship ties as a recruitment mechanism are variably significant, but the nature of friendship ties differs in various types of groups and is influenced by religious beliefs, especially by the groups' teachings regarding proselytisation. Stark and Bainbridge (1980a and 1980b) analysed friendship ties in the recruitment to religious groups and demonstrated that conventional religions, as well as more unusual sects or cults, depend heavily upon friendship bonds for new recruits. Likewise, Greil and Rudy (1984: 318), having examined ten groups of case studies on conversion to assess

Lofland-Stark's process model found that the two elements, affective bonds and intensive interaction with group members seem to be indispensable prerequisites for conversion. However, many studies have found that other elements of the Lofland-Stark model may be crucial in some cases. Galanter (1980: 1578), for example, studying the Unification Church, found that a crucial difference between people who joined the Unification Church and those who toyed with the idea of membership but did not join was that the latter group had more "outside affiliations" than the former group.

Of the seven steps of Lofland-Stark's process model, some seem to be applicable to the present sample while others do not. More than anything else, Lofland and Stark's research was found to be relevant to this study in that their investigation also included individuals who had "relinquished a more widely-held perspective for an unknown and, often, socially devalued one." Such a description would seem to be applicable to the present sample, for they have indeed rejected a more widely-held perspective offered to them by their society and have instead adopted Islam, which is little known in the West, and often perceived to be socially inferior. The relevance of Lofland-Stark's seven step process model to the present sample will be examined.

The first process, experiencing acute tensions prior to conversion, is discernible in only a few accounts. Those who spoke of tension did not experience it acutely. This, however, may be due to the fact that the subjects were, because of their age, beyond the stresses which normally accompany adolescence and the integration struggle. These individuals had resolved this struggle by rejecting the religion or culture in which they were raised and entering a "spiritual moratorium" period.

The second process, thinking in terms of a religious problem-solving perspective, seems to be true of the present sample in as far as they sought a religious solution to questions of ultimate significance.

The third process, seekership, can not be seen as a necessary predisposing factor, though it seems to define some cases. While the sample contains 20 subjects who were involved in NRMs after rejecting religion of origin and defined themselves as "religious seeker", it also consists of men and women who converted for the sake of marriage. While some subjects spent a substantial period in active searching between the rejection of the old religion and acceptance of the new, others did not bother about it. This dimension of the Lofland-Stark model may be applicable to the present sample in the sense that many of them (47%) had cognitive concerns, and the vast majority described themselves as being nominal in their religion. However, in a later paper Lofland (1977b) has suggested that perhaps this dimension of the model is not as

important as originally assumed, since "people not previously religious at all have joined" movements such as the Unification Church "in noticeable numbers" since the late sixties. Snow and Phillips' (1980: 438) findings corroborate Lofland's later observation. The vast majority of their sample were not seekers in the sense of searching for some satisfactory system of religious meaning. They do not suggest, however, that religious seekership was not operative in the case of many preconverts. They classified 22 percent of their sample as "seekers." Yet, the fact that 78 percent were not self-designated religious "experimenters" or "searchers" suggests that the linkage between seekership and conversion is not a necessary one.

The fourth process, encountering the [cult] at a turning point in life seems to be applicable to those who converted through marriage, and to a few subjects who experienced conversion after moving into a big city. However, this process does not seem to be applicable to many since conversions, in general, came about when they had already developed a settled life-style.

The fifth factor, called the formation of affective bonds, seems to be of crucial importance. The majority reported being influenced by a Muslim friend or an acquaintance who had nurtured them along the way.

The sixth process, the absence or neutralisation of extra-cult attachments, is non-existent in the experiences of converts to Islam. They never isolated themselves from the surrounding society, although some isolated themselves from their family.

The seventh factor, intensive participation in the activities of the group, does not appear to have been an important factor, although a substantial number of the subjects said that they had occasionally started practising some articles of Islam. As a consequence, their level of activity would be very high in comparison with their corresponding activity for their previous religious commitment.

It may be concluded then that Lofland and Stark's paradigm of conversion to a minority religious belief is only partially applicable to the present sample. It cannot be claimed that Lofland-Stark's model is a general model of conversion applicable to all groups. Austin (1977: 283), for example, examined the applicability of Lofland-Stark's model to "born-again" Christians and found that most stages can be rejected as being necessary determinants of conversion. Austin found that all seven conditions were not present in even one subject. However, Lofland-Stark's model has often been treated as if it was a general model of the conversion process by researchers studying groups of a more varied (in ideology, organisation, and public reaction) form than that of

Lofland and Stark Lofland, in a later paper (1977b: 816) made it clear that Stark and himself did not claim their model to be valid for conversion to other movements. Rather, he purported that each process model is valid for the range of events it addresses. But, he stated, some investigators get obsessed in trying to determine if their model is "right" with regard to the groups they studied. The material in this study suggests that there is no one process model that can account for all cases of conversion. Giving too much weight in favour of one approach such as "subjective" and "organisational" approaches may not lead to whole understanding of conversion. This study agrees with the investigators (Richardson and Stewart, 1977: 820, Snow and Phillips, 1980: 444, Greil and Rudy, 1984: 318) of religious conversion in that the conversion process may well be different in different kinds of groups. Furthermore, from Lofland and Stark on, some investigators of conversion to NRMs have tended to focus on the group as the unit of analysis rather than the individual and have implied that conversion is a one event phenomenon, in that all individuals who join a particular group have the same background characteristics, join for the same reasons and go through the same changes. In fact, as the analysis of converts' background involved in this study illustrates, this is not always so. They varied in their background, their reasons, and their conversion patterns.

However, in the light of the present findings certain processes seem to be common within the current group of converts to Islam as follows: (1) Religious conversion is more likely to occur if the individual deems the religion of origin and values presented to him by his parents or society as irrelevant to his current life. As a consequence, he enters a sort of "spiritual moratorium" that may last some years. At the end of this period the person must still experience disillusionment with society at large and still define himself as nominal in his religion. During this period he may have either cognitive concerns, sometimes causing him to seek answers from other religions, or emotional distress arising from personal problems such as divorce which may cause him to contemplate the possibility that religion could be the answer to his problems. Apparently, because of his nominal level of belief and previous rejection of the family the person must rule out the possibility of returning to the 'old' religion. To move back to the religion of childhood may mean the tacit approval of the family which he does not wish to do. Thus he is prevented from a return to his religion of origin and must continue to look elsewhere. In this way he is sensitive to other possibilities. (2) At this stage the presence of other significant Muslims is important since it is often Muslim individuals who make Islam available. The potential convert encounters Islam through social relationships (this could be through preexisting ties like marriage or chance encounters), and mass media or any other available sources of information. Affective ties to Muslims, though not always necessary, are usually developed. The individual is affected by the

example of the Muslim/s or the atmosphere as he perceives it, and at the same time he may question the truth of the Islam (3) The individual may go through a preparational period Before he announces himself as a convert little by little he may play the role of convert by learning some practices of Islam, and a life-style which becomes a part of him as he takes on a new definition of his own individuality and personality He may explore its suitability and try it out. It is important to note that the potential convert in the current investigation seems to test out the new faith experimentally, rather than embracing it without thought

It is concluded that religious conversion does not emerge out of a single influence, but out of the mutual interaction of various forces that make a person sensitive to conversion This study does not deny other approaches to religious conversion, since both the motivational model focusing on predispositions and the activistic approach pointing out the role of the subject appear to have value The pattern that emerges from this study is that people decide to play roles and get involved in new beliefs and practices with a more thoroughgoing acceptance of beliefs occurring later in the process The model presented here is implicitly activist in orientation, because of its stress on the decision to become involved in the role The present finding regarding the experimental motif (60%) which stresses the activistic view of conversion shows that one cannot avoid the part played by the convert At the same time one has to realise that conversion is a social phenomenon, with affection and emotional ties playing key roles in the affirmative decision Therefore, the material in this study suggests that the conversion experience for the interviewees studied is gradual in nature and therefore encompasses the whole process of change in its definition It is often a long and protracted process It includes a reorientation of the personality system and involves change in the constellation of religious beliefs and practices, as it will be presented in the next chapter However, it must be reiterated that this process model is based on the accounts of 70 non-randomly selected converts, and, therefore, can not be generalised for all native British converts to Islam since this study is an idiographic one which is not backed up with a subsequent nomothetic study



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **POSTCONVERSION : THE TRANSFORMED SELF**

## **THE NEW BEING**

This chapter aims to examine the changes the converts described after their conversion. It intends to look at intellectual, moral, and social changes, changes in beliefs and practices, behaviour, social relations, loss of old friendship or family ties, and the converts' relationship with society in general and with Muslims.

Religion is a very effective context for identity as it is generally accompanied by moral systems which support identity by establishing basic values of right and wrong, good and bad, and by regulating interpersonal conduct (Baumeister, 1986: 248, Shafranske, 1992: 167), or at least it is one of the subidentities among others of which an individual's identity is made up (Bert-Hallahmi, 1989: 101). Modern Western society may produce identity problems because it has relegated religion to a minor role and therefore abandoned the context of religion for identity. It is in this context that the conversion experience provided the converts involved in this study with an identity.

Religious conversion is defined as a definite break with one's former identity such that the past and the present are antithetical in some important respects. Investigators of conversion seem virtually unanimous that conversion involves a radical change in one's identity, direction, beliefs, personality, ideas, behaviour, and values (Travisano, 1970: 600, Snow and Machalek, 1983: 264, Barker and Currie, 1985: 305, Gillespie, 1991: 67).

The conversion process from one religion to another is made up of changes that involve large areas of personality, and these vary according to the religion itself. Parrucci (1968: 145) defines conversion as "a reorientation of the personality system involving a change in the constellation of religious beliefs and/or practices." The extent of personality reorientation involved is determined by two factors: the degree of commitment to the new socioreligious ideology engendered in the convert, and the degree of similarity between pre and postconversion identity. With regard to the first, Lofland and Stark (1965) have drawn a distinction between "verbal converts," who maintained limited involvement in the new religion, and "total converts," who exhibit their commitment through regular and active involvement. The magnitude of personality change affected by religious conversion is also determined by the level of similarity between preexistent and postconversion self-definition. Parrucci (1968: 146) differentiates conversions that require a major transformation in basic religious identity (e.g., Catholic to Buddhist) and those that involve changes in emphasis, but not major identity restructuring (e.g., Presbyterian to Methodist). Singer (1980: 171) terms these respectively "inter-faith" and "intra-faith" conversions.

Likewise, Travisano (1970) separates mere alterations in faith commitment from true conversion referring to intra-faith and inter-faith conversion. Here we are concerned with inter-faith conversion.

Gillespie (1991: 73), dealing with the experience of religious conversion in general, distinguished three aspects of the identity issue. *First*, the obvious organisational affiliation of the conversional change provides a new sense of belonging and acceptance. *Second*, religious conversion may provide a sense of personal identity and it challenges the person to reorganise himself on a deep level of consciousness. *Third*, religious conversion provides a sense of cosmic identity.

Along both structural and subjective dimensions of religious change, the interviewees reported an identity change of greater magnitude. "Why did I have to become a Muslim if I was not going to change?", one convert said. The converts said that this had emerged naturally. One subject pointed at the grass blossoming on the edge of the pavement (while we were walking together) and metaphorically related his conversion to this grass, saying "it is natural, you cannot stop it." All the converts laid stress on the achievement of convert status/identity.

Now in conversion, the purpose and meaning of life take on major importance for the convert, the decision to change forms the basis which enables him to view life from a different perspective. The change caused by conversion fundamentally transformed their conception of the world and changed the converts' perception of the universe of discourse in which their meanings were understood. Thus becoming a Muslim resulted in a change of identity at both a personal and a public level. They committed themselves to reshaping their lives. Their purposes in life became clear on a very personal level. Simon said "My actions are now for God and I have a reason to live. I understand Islam as an ideology, not just as a religion of praying, etc. Islam encompasses the whole of your life and every action you do." Kevin said

"I sort of felt like that life has become manageable. All my life had always seemed like events and everyone else were always one step ahead of me and I could never catch up with them. It feels like now that I am in control of my life in a way. Whereas before it had always seemed like somehow there was always something I was missing. I do not know exactly what it was. But now it brings everything into equilibrium and balance. That is the best thing about it."

The changes that follow the act of conversion are directed at the task of consolidating psychological gains. As soon as new concepts are adopted, a stock-taking follows which records the advantages of the new concepts over the old. Simultaneously, the reinterpretation of reality begins. Thus, in conversion, a new world is entered, and the old world is transformed through reinterpretation. For the majority of the sample, change had started as soon as they accepted the

new perspective. Indeed, for some it had even started before they formally accepted, it since many were taking an experimental attitude or mixing with Muslims.

The majority of the subjects did not report going through any postconversion depression. This may be explained by the fact that the conversion process had taken a long time, during which the individuals weighed the pros and cons of their conversion. However, for some converts the transition took an especially lengthy period of time. These converts went through a critical period, they still had some doubts and relapses occurred periodically. "I had for quite some months trouble in saying God because I didn't believe in it before", Keith said. But in the end they "took the plunge", as one interviewee described it. Five (7%) subjects reported going through a transition period in which they attempted to do the things they had been doing in the past which were unacceptable in Islam. They did not feel confident that they could fulfil the demands that Islam required. Nick, for example, felt that it demanded a lot. "I sometimes wished that I had belief in the Christian religion or even Buddhism because they are easier to live, not so demanding, but I knew if I did that, I wouldn't be truthful because I believed in Islam." Henry suffered a 'relapse' for a period because he thought he was too young and would be unable to practise it.

"There was no critical period during the process, but the trouble came after that. It wasn't to do with the worship aspect of Islam, I was particularly convinced about that, about the unity of God. The difficulty was that I was so young and I hadn't really experienced life very much. So it was a very big problem not being married for example. So that gave me a lot of problems to the extent that at the first year I sort of left the community completely and had a difficult time for about six months and I stopped practising. I realised that everyday that I was away I was thinking about the people and to the extent that I got more and more distressed and more and more dissatisfied with myself. So in the end I realised that I had no other possibility for the way I could live my life, I couldn't see any other way of living my life."

Religious groups require those who join them to change their formal identity by adopting a new name which is a way of fostering higher involvement through external identity symbols and stronger identification with the group (Beit-Hallahmi, 1989: 101). One of the first things that the converts interviewed seem to do is to take a new Islamic name. It is almost always done when the convert takes the *shahādah* in front of others. It is suggested s/he take a name although this is not required unless the existing name has a bad meaning. Of the 70 converts, 57 (81%) now bear an Islamic name while 13 (19%) do not. Most of those who have taken an Islamic name use their new names within the Muslim community while they use their old name in their daily life in the society. Only 4 (6%) people have changed their name legally and they use it in all of their interactions. Some of those who did not take an Islamic name expressed that by keeping their name they are able "to show people that it is possible to be both English and Muslim". Most of those who took an

Islamic name preferred the common names in Judeo-Christian and Islamic tradition or names similar to their Christian names, such as Maryam for Mary and Dāwūd for David

It has been proposed that converts tend to denounce preconversion life as sinful and immoral (Ullman, 1989: 15) and they tend to exaggerate their preconversion "sufferings" or "sins" so as to glorify their present salvation (Heinich, 1977). However, only 12 (17%) of the converts involved in the present study regarded themselves as sinful in the past. Twenty five (36%) subjects regarded their conversion as fulfilling. The rest described their preconversion life as purposeless, ignorant, or in the wrong direction. Twelve (17%) said that their lives had been purposeless. Eight (11%) described them as lost, 6 (8%) said that they had been ignorant while 7 (10%) said that their lives had been going in the wrong direction. Freddie was one of those who described their former life as lost.

"I see my early life as a lost. There is a lot about it that I regret, not from the point of being sinful or anything like that. I have the certain sense of missed opportunity. Perhaps if I'd had a more ordered life, a framework of a belief, or a community or something like that which I would have felt a part of it, perhaps I would not have felt as lost as I did."

Kathleen sees her previous life style as in the wrong direction

"Because you live a western type of life. You go to discos, you go to drink thinking, about enjoyment, yourself, and your ego all the time. Whereas in Islam you stop thinking about yourself and start seeing others, and problems in the world."

Some see their previous life, despite its frivolity or possible detrimental effects on them, as the process which led them to conversion. They believe that if they had not destroyed themselves completely, they would have been unable to rebuild and shape themselves again. Peter was one of them. "My former life was necessary because everything that has gone before has brought me to this point. Therefore, if I hadn't had my previous life, then I may not have reached this point." The converts interviewed felt that they were cleansed from all the dregs of the past. They felt that by accepting Islam they were wiped clean of their former sins and the "bad deeds" they had committed. It is, in fact, the Islamic precept that made them feel that way. According to Islamic law, once one is converted, he is cleansed of his previous sins.

### **1- Change: Beliefs, Practices, and Habits**

Inter-faith conversion is primarily concerned with changes in the contents of faith. The converts involved in this study, by the act of pronouncing the *shahādah*, accepted the oneness of God, and the Prophet Muhammad as His last messenger. The idea of Jesus being God or the Son of God was dropped and the doctrine of the Trinity was refused. Jesus was accepted as one

of the Prophets in the line before the Prophet Muhammad, and He did not die on the cross but was lifted to heaven. Converts now believe that Jesus' and Muhammad's mission was in essence the same. As one convert said "by accepting Islam Jesus' dream of 'one flock and one shepherd' is fulfilled in Islam." For them, Islam meant finding the end of the line started by the Prophet Abraham, not rejection of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Alan said "Isa (our master Jesus) and Abraham and Moses and Muhammad, going all the way back through are all connected." Conversion for them did not mean a total renunciation of their former religious tradition, and they even found what they had learned from their previous religion helpful in understanding Islam. Mike said that his previous experience with Christianity had been very helpful. "I've never had a great deal of problem with the moral teaching of Islam because so much of it was very similar with Christianity." They see that their conversion has achieved a culmination in Islam, and express no hostility or anger towards those who practise Christianity or Judaism.

In terms of religious practices, converts expressed that they did not in general find them difficult. Since they went through a preparational period before their conversion, when they formally accepted Islam their commitment to some practices occurred naturally. However, no matter how much they felt they were prepared to commit themselves, some aspects still remained hard to digest and observe, since Islam brought a lot of restrictions to them. But in general, they committed themselves to observing these restrictions. Simon said "I had come into Islam which put a lot of restrictions on my life, to things what I used to do before. But I was still happy, I've done this because it would change my life." A few people became Muslims without going through any preparational period, and had little knowledge of Islam and Islamic teachings. They had to learn, for example, how to pray in Arabic, although some said they prayed in English for a time. In learning the elements of Islam, and committing themselves to the new faith some were very eager and dynamic, while others took it more gradually. Adam said "Prayers were the first thing I really wanted to devote myself to. Because it seemed to me it is the thing which I'd missed in my life." Helen, on the other hand, reported that it took her quite some time to start praying regularly.

Thirty four (49%) converts reported that they now observe five daily prayers. Some are not able to pray during the day because of work conditions, but they pray in the evening. Thirty six (51%) do not practise five daily prayers regularly, although they think they should. However, all reported that they try to say the Friday prayers if they are not working at the time of the prayer. Nineteen (27%) reported that they do not observe fasting properly in *Ramadan*, but that they fast for a few days, while 51 (73%) said they observe the fast for the whole month.

The converts interviewed seem to initially practise the "don'ts" rather than "do's" of Islam. They are more likely to abstain from pork, alcohol, and sex outside marriage, rather than observing prayers and fast. Bernard said "I stopped drinking straightaway, it wasn't very difficult, but prayer came a year after." Perhaps this may be explained by the fact that many were social drinkers or stopped drinking before their conversion. Some were already not eating pork because they were vegetarian. Others may have been observing the moral aspects of their former religion. All converts now observe the Islamic diet regarding pork. All but 6 people reported that they did not drink alcohol. Charlie is one of those who still drinks occasionally.

"I would very very occasionally have one glass of beer even now. It is out of habit more than anything else. It is a cultural thing I would think. You associate having a long day's working with coming off the hills and going into a pub and having a glass of beer, and not to do it you would feel as if the day is not quite complete. So drinking has virtually gone, but not completely gone."

For some, conversion facilitated identity change, enabling them to give up some personal habits such as drunkenness and drugs. Six (8.6%) subjects who reported drug-use prior to conversion and 7 (10%) subjects who reported excessive alcohol use prior to conversion do not use drugs or drink alcohol at all any more.

Regarding dress, it presented difficulty for women rather than men, because in Islam, due to her physical nature the woman is required to cover her body and hair. Of the 20 women, 14 (70%) wear a scarf (5 do not wear it tight under the neck), while 6 (30%) do not wear it. But all the women wear long sleeves and a high neck, and skirts below the knees. Wearing a scarf proved difficult to get used to. Diana could not wear it for a long time because she felt embarrassed with it. Rebecca does not see a scarf as necessary and she concentrates on changing herself "inside". She also finds wearing a scarf difficult because she is English.

"If you are English and you are brought up in this country and then you become a Muslim, you have to try and find your own way of doing things because you continue to be English. The whole thing of a code of behaviour or a code of dress and that sort of things would be at the back of my mind whatever I was trying to do. So it is not enough simply to start wearing a veil because essentially what you are trying to do is change yourself inside. So I feel for myself I have to go, to some extent, by the accepted norms of the society I live in. So what is regarded as modest dress (long sleeves and a high neck and the skirt under knees), would be the sort of standards I would set for myself. I mean I don't wear scarf when I am out. Because basically, I don't feel comfortable. That might change as time goes on, but I don't really want to draw attention to myself."

Of the 50 men, only 3 (6%) changed their dress completely. They wear robes and a turban. They are of the opinion that the Muslim man should distinguish himself from non-Muslims. All of those who are involved in Sufism and around half of the others wear a beard now. But this is not necessarily a thing brought about by conversion, since some had beards before conversion and

some would have grown them even if they had not become Muslim. Of the 50 male subjects, 16 (32%) had circumcision after their conversion, while 24 (48%) did not. Ten (20%) people were circumcised when they were a child, either due to coming from a Jewish background or for hygienic reasons.

So regarding former habits and practices, the sample covers people who gave up former habits and took the new practices immediately, and people who still keep some of their former habits. It consists of people who bet occasionally although they know it is forbidden in their new religion, and people who even avoid using the expression "I bet you!" because it is a kind of gambling. Thus, it may be concluded that change of the values and habits, etc. which one inherits from the past do not come automatically. The interviewees see their conversion as a continuing process, rather than a cut off point. However, a question which may be raised here is whether converts are more committed than life-long Muslims. To answer this question, there is unfortunately no available data on life-long Muslims to make comparisons. Therefore, this study has not considered the degrees of religiosity. Since styles of religiosity have seldom been explored in non-Christian religions it was felt that such an exploration was beyond the scope of this thesis.

## **2- Maintenance and Socialisation**

The maintenance of a new or altered identity requires a structure to make it workable and it is within that structure that commitment flourishes. Conversion is also described as a process of resocialisation with distinctive ideas and values. The convert learns a language and a life-style which become a part of himself as he takes on a new definition of his own individuality and personality and of the social context in which he participates (Wilson, 1982: 119). Commitment following conversion often forms a sociological bond in a community. When a conversion occurs it matters a great deal how the new community of faith provides for the ongoing sponsorship of the new convert. In this case, sponsorship can be seen as the way a person or community provides affirmation, encouragement, guidance and models for a person's ongoing growth and development (Fowler, 1981: 286-7). Most of the interviewees reported that they had received this sponsorship from the Muslim community around them. They were welcomed by Muslims with great sympathy in the sense that they embraced Islam willingly.

The person who wants to remain converted must engineer his social life in accordance with his purpose. This may require the individual to disassociate himself from previous associates or groups that constituted the plausibility structure of his past religious reality while he associates himself with those who sponsor him in his new religious reality. As Berger and Luckman (1971



177) pointed out "To have a conversion experience is nothing much. The real thing is to be able to keep on taking it seriously, to retain a sense of its plausibility. This is where the religious community comes in. It provides the indispensable plausibility structure for the new identity. In other words, Saul may have become Paul in the aloneness of religious ecstasy, but he could remain Paul only in the context of the Christian community that recognised him as such and confirmed the 'new being' in which he now located this identity." Likewise, Meadow and Kahoe (1984: 108) emphasised that some of the success of a healthy conversion, versus an unhealthy, regressive conversion experience lies in the quality of later contacts with adherents of the new faith. Long and Hadden (1983), in their study of Moonies (Unification Church), suggested that conversion is understandable as an instance of a more general process of socialisation, rather than being a qualitatively unique phenomenon which requires concept-specific explanation. Long and Hadden (1983: 8) attributed the growth of Moonies in the 1970s to their successfully exercised methods of socialisation, which had initially been so inept in the 1960s. They concluded that "Had it not been for their ineptitude at socializing new members, the Unification Church could have achieved far greater success in the sixties. And without their new acumen in socialization, it is hard to believe they would have made it, even in the 1970s."

Almost all writers using the term *identity* imply that identity establishes *what* and *where* the person is in social terms. When one has a new identity in the shape of a social object, by the acknowledgement of participation in social relations a person establishes an identity for both himself and others to facilitate meaningful interaction. The convert reflects at great length on his change. He and all others see his change as monumental, and he is identified by himself and others as a new or different person (Travisano, 1970: 597, 602). Greil and Rudy (1984: 317) categorised the NRMs in the West into two types on the basis of the differences among the groups in terms of the converts' social roles. *Type one* includes groups which, like the Unification Church, Hare Krishna and Divine Light Mission, are stigmatised and involve a radical discontinuity of social roles. *Type two* includes groups, like Crusade House, the Levites and Nichiren Shoshu, which are not stigmatised and which do not cause a drastic transformation of social roles. Seekership and neutralisation of extra-cult attachments seem to be prerequisites for conversion in the context of the former, but not in the context of the latter. Regarding the social roles, the converts interviewed fall into the second type of group. They still regard themselves as members of their society and they do not favour isolation. On the contrary, they are fully conscious and aware of their own local environment as well as the universal aspects of the faith they have adopted. Most still keep their previous names, jobs, etc. More importantly, they see no contradiction between being Muslim and English/British and living in this society. However, many

do not make their new identity central to all interactions in society, while they do make it central in their interactions within the Muslim community

So far, it is clear that there must be social conditions for a successfully maintained religious conversion and this social base is essential so that the convert can get continuous confirmation and recognition from other individuals. Marriage seems to be the most important agent of this social condition in many cases, since the great majority of converts who were not married at the time of their conversion married Muslims after conversion feeling that they would fail in their duties if they married non-Muslims. Forty eight (68%) are married or engaged now (only one is engaged). All but one who married after conversion have Muslim partners. Fifteen (21.4%) people married converts (4 convert couples were involved in this study). Almost all who were not married stated that their future partner should be a Muslim. Only 4 (5.7%) said that the religion of a prospective partner was not important. Andrew is one of them. " I think love comes into it as well. Compatibility is also important. Probably, I would hope that I might meet a Muslim woman, but I would have to keep it open "

### **3- Cultural Transition**

A person's cultural identity is a matter very close to the heart, since one's present existence is shaped by one's past. Any attempt to desecrate it against one's will may create a lot of unhappiness and instability. It has been said that when Christianity began to spread through the Roman Empire, the greater concern was of Christianity becoming pagan, rather than of the Roman Empire becoming Christian (Sharma, 1985: 124). A similar concern is relevant to the converts involved in this study. Will they westernise Islam or will they become Islamised and assimilated into the culture of Muslims around them? Will they go through a cultural transition? The answers to these questions vary according to the changes each convert has experienced. Some converts have formally changed their names, the way they dress, their attitudes and values, while there are converts who have not changed their dress, nor even taken an Islamic name, and who still keep some of their previous habits and values. A crucial point needs to be emphasised here. Converting to Islam does not necessarily mean excluding being English or British. Elements of Christian religious traditions can be found in the life-style of a convert unless it absolutely contradicts Islam. To give but one example, some converts stated that they celebrate Christmas on the grounds that it is the birthday of Prophet Isa (Jesus), and they exchange presents with their family at Christmas. The converts studied tried to find a practical way of adopting Islam in Britain on their own level in order to fit in and live in this society. As Janet stated

"I did everything with confidence. If you haven't got confidence in doing things while people tell you that you mustn't do this and this and then you realise in time you can't live like that. It has to be practical in Britain as well. So you find your own level at the end and you fit in. You actually find that balance. Because you can not be so strict as you wouldn't be able to live here."

Most of the converts interviewed seem not to have changed culturally. They have not wiped out their culture completely, even though they have undergone some cultural changes over the years. They do not feel that by becoming Muslim they have been "Arabised" or "Pakistanised". They feel that they are still English/British and see no conflict between culture before one becoming Muslim and afterwards. They feel that it is just as valid to be a British Muslim as being a Nigerian Muslim or an Egyptian Muslim. Richard said:

"Islam is a religion that overlays the culture. The religion which gave rise to the British culture is of course Christianity. And a particular style of Christianity is not actually incompatible with Islam. The thing which helped this culture evolve is in itself quite akin to Islam, therefore, Islam and European culture should be able to sit quite comfortably. Islam and Europe are so closely connected over the last thousand years. Simply by following British culture and adopting the religion of Islam there wouldn't be any conflict. I am proud of being an English man. Being a Pakistani or whatever wouldn't necessarily bring me any closer to Islam."

Steve expressed that it is an advantage to have access to both Islamic and Western culture, since he is able to take what is good from both. However, the convert sometimes faces the problems of being between two cultures. Ibrahim Hewitt (1990), a convert to Islam, observed that the "two-headed syndrome" often afflicts new Muslims, as he writes:

"We all experience it sometimes - you walk into a mosque and every head turns slowly and blatantly to stare at you, suspicion oozing towards you. After checking your files, you realise that they are not looking at a fellow Muslim, they are looking at a white man who has been introduced on the Asian ghetto."

Instead of associating with a specific Muslim community, the converts interviewed had a feeling of belonging to the greater Muslim community and the universal brotherhood. They did not feel at ease with the culture or tradition of Muslim communities around them. They stated that some elements of different ethnic communities had been inserted into Islam and regarded as part of it. Therefore, they tried to understand Islam differently from Muslims of other ethnic backgrounds and bring an inquisitive mind to their new fellows' cultural understanding of Islam and break some of the un-Islamic practices and attitudes prevailing in the Muslim community. They felt that Muslims confused culture with their religion. Anthony said: "Many born-Muslims will have particular ideas of Islam which perhaps reflect cultural traditions or conservatism or things rather than Islam itself."

In response to the question "Would you wish you had been born into a Muslim family or in Muslim country?", 51 (72.8%) subjects said "No", while only 19 (27.1%) said "Yes". All of those who gave a positive answer were people who had suffered before conversion, having experienced traumatic events like parental divorce or had a divorce themselves. They felt that they would not have suffered if they had been brought up as Muslims. Most of those who did not wish to have been born into a Muslim family or in a Muslim country said that if that had been the case they would not be able to see the difference between Islam and the culture adopted by Muslims. Some did not wish to have been born Muslim, since they found conversion itself to have been a wonderful experience, and they had had a terrific voyage of discovery which people born Muslim hadn't have. Others had a feeling of pride in themselves for coming to Islam after "seeing, tasting and rejecting everything". So they saw themselves as understanding Islam better than life-long Muslims, because their Islam is mixed with non-Islamic culture.

#### **4- Relations with Parents, Ex-Friends, and the Society**

Converting to Islam in a non-Muslim society may mean social suicide and boycott for some converts. But sometimes objections raised by the family and friends of the converts interviewed tended to make them more determined to carry on their new life. One convert said that he had decided to adopt an Islamic name legally to make it clear to his friends (who thought he would grow out of it) that he had taken up Islam in earnest. Here, it must be emphasised that hearing others talk about oneself or even receiving postconversion reaction may provide the convert with a convert status and an identity which serves to enhance the ongoing processes of self-definition as a successful convert.

According to the converts' perception of their parents' attitude towards their conversion, their parents may be classified into three types: (1) those who were hostile or extremely unhappy about it. They felt that their son/daughter had turned their back on everything they had given them. Thirteen (19%) subjects' parents were judged to fall into this group. The type of reaction varied. Some treated their son/daughter's acceptance of Islam as a "social death". Anne's mother, who was a strong Catholic, told her she would be "like she was dead" to her. Rachel's father did not speak to her for two years. "He was too angry, which is really quite strange because he doesn't have any belief. But he explained it to me two years later that he is a great royalist and he felt that by taking Islam I'd slighted the Queen and slighted being British. And that offended him very much." Type (2), those who were more or less indifferent to it. Twenty-two (31%) converts' parents did not take it badly, or showed little or no interest in knowing about it. Some were not delighted, and felt socially ashamed of their son/daughter, but they let their son/daughter

continue with what they wanted David's parents respected his decision, although they were not very pleased with it

"I didn't have any particular reactions for it because they were not practising Christians in the first place And they think I'm grown up and it is my decision My mother says that she sees improvement in my behaviour and in my attitudes since I've become Muslim I let them see the changes in myself and be affected by it "

John's father was indifferent "My father refuses to talk about it He even did not ask why I became Muslim He just changes the subject " Fiona's father was a bit cynical about it and her mother did not say much at all, but she felt Fiona was crazy She said to Fiona she was taking a step back to the Middle Ages when she started wearing a scarf Two female subjects reported that their parents opposed them marrying a Muslim after their conversion, though they were not upset by their conversion in the beginning Type (3), those who welcomed their son/daughter's decision Ten (14%) subjects' parents fall into this group They were pleased that their son/daughter had found something they could relate to Henry said that his parents perceived that Islam had changed him for the better and could not really say anything about it When Nigel, who was a violent and aggressive person, told his mother that he had become Muslim and he would respect her from then on as Islam demanded him to do so, his mother responded to him saying "Why didn't you become Muslim before then?" Some of the parents in this category had some worries about their son/daughter's conversion initially, but soon they, like Alex's parents became more positive "They were very worried But having spent a week at home they saw I was still normal, healthy and not doing anything crazy or not dressing differently, and they stopped worrying " The parents in this category seemed to have appreciation of, or an interest in, their son/daughter's new choice In fact, two subjects reported that they got their mothers converted to Islam sometime after their conversion

Seventeen (24%) converts did not have the opportunity to see the reactions of their parents, since some had lost their parents before conversion, and others were/are not in touch with them They were ostensibly free of any ties with their parents Charlie said "The sort of relationship I have with my parents is that we correspond once or twice a year And you don't talk about your conversion in your letters" Eight (11%) people did not tell their parents that they had converted They felt that they had to keep their conversion secret for a time Debbie, who converted after marrying a Muslim, was one of them "My parents don't know about it If I tell them, they will say I am crazy and they will hate my husband " Some did not let their parents know in order not to hurt them Leonard said "I didn't tell my Parents If I told them, it would be too

upsetting for them " Arthur also did not want to hurt his parents "My brother died a few years ago and I was the only son and I didn't want to be in a situation where they lost second son "

No matter how strongly and negatively the interviewees' parents reacted, in all cases, they reported, there has been either partial or complete reconciliation at a later date They now have an improved relationship, or at least an understanding with their parents Todd's parents were not happy about his conversion, but they came to terms with it as time went on Now Todd and his Pakistani wife live together with his parents They visit or stay with their parents at Christian festivals like Christmas

Four (5.7%) subjects (all male) were married to Christians when they converted One convert's wife died four years ago and he had no problems in his marriage regarding his conversion Another got a divorce 14 years after his conversion, but this was nothing to do with the conversion The other two are still married to Christians One has no problems in his marriage concerning his conversion, while the other's marriage was slightly affected by the conversion

The interviewees' accounts describe their friends' reactions to conversion in a number of ways They infrequently refer to the generation of hostility between themselves and former friends because of conversion In Nigel's case this hostility manifested itself in others' tendencies to ridicule the convert Nigel's friends at work started calling him "messiah" In most cases, however, there was no hostility, and friendship died out gradually Simon recollected how his friends stopped seeing him

"My friends were shocked because I used to spend a lot of time with them. They said "Simon is a Muslim now, he can't drink with us, he can't go out with us " They didn't like it. Now I was alien to them and after a few weeks they stopped visiting me at all Now very very occasionally I see them I haven't seen my best friend for nearly two years "

In most cases it was the ex-friends who cut off relationship rather than the convert But in other cases the converts themselves wanted this relationship cut off as they felt they would not be able to maintain their new identity Some subjects still keep their relationship with their friends and they received no aggression or hostility and found their friends respected their new choice Roger is one such convert

"My friends are moral and ethical people They are perhaps religious in a personal sense If I go round in a pub with them, I will get along with juice or mineral water I feel no reason to move away from my old friends because they are genuine, honest and it would be intellectually and morally dishonest of me to reject them because they are not different than they were before."

Most of those who keep in contact with their friends have a feeling that the attachment between them is not as it used to be. For some, losing friends presented no problems because they had very little contact with them, in part due to circumstances long before conversion, and partly because when the formal conversion finally occurred the social base of their conversion was established and they had already become part of the new community.

The interviewees' perception of a greater society, or their relation to it varies according to their immediate environment. A person is more likely to know and be known by neighbours in smaller towns. The small-town dwellers care more what their neighbours do and say, as the saying goes, "everybody's business is everybody's business in a small town" (Batson and Ventis, 1982: 46). However, wherever the converts live they may experience tension within the environment, because by conversion they have moved from social acceptability to social unacceptability. They may still go through great turmoil and concern, especially if their parents are strong in their faith, or if they are greatly concerned about their respectability in their environment. Converts who live in Muslim populated parts of the country may experience less stress than those who live in the areas where Muslims are almost nonexistent. Charles used to work in a city where he could relate to Muslims, but due to redundancy he was forced to move back to his home town where there are no Muslims, and feels that it is like a foreign place to him.

The interviewees reported that in general they keep a low profile. They do not talk to non-Muslims about Islam, or why they embraced Islam unless they are asked to do so. However, four (5.7%) reported that they were able to "help some people come to Islam." On the other hand, they seem to be more active within the Muslim community. Eleven (15.7%) people work, paid or voluntarily, for Islamic organisations. Some were given jobs because they were English. Four (5.7%) give talks on Islam in meetings organised by Muslim organisations. Five (7.1%) are involved with various activities like teaching in local Muslim communities.

To conclude, it has been found that an individual cannot completely forget the previous meaning of their social world even after transition (Dollah, 1979: 77). The present study, by and large, confirms this finding. Change requires a process of resocialisation. It is more difficult than the process of socialisation in the previous world because it is affected by the existing meaning in individual self. An individual tends to reshape or modify the world view when he enters the new province of meaning. Sometimes he tries to reinterpret the past province of meaning and then reshape it. For some of the converts in the present sample transition to the new province of world view is not necessarily accompanied by a complete change of social world. That is to say, resocialisation may never be completed for some converts.

Although the lives of the individuals studied here changed markedly as a result of their conversion experience, and in adopting new beliefs and life-styles, one may still question whether these changes entailed a transformation of the self. With regard to the change of the self the approach presented by William James (1890-1909) may be an explanation. James distinguished two aspects of the self as object and subject, the "me" and the "I". The former is the self as known, or the "empirical ego" being everything the person calls his/hers, including the material self (body and possessions), the social selves (roles, relations, and interpersonal traits), and the spiritual self (thoughts, beliefs and values, psychological mechanisms). The latter, on the other hand, refers to "pure ego" as knower, which is present in all of the person's experience and which constitutes experience and is therefore elusive and difficult to examine. Following James' explanation, this study has focused on the study of "me" leaving the "I" to philosophical inquiry. Evidence has been found that for most converts important components of the "me" changed in consequence of conversion. However, conversion brought different consequences for each individual, not in the content of their new belief system, but in the degree of commitment. Some made their religious commitment a total way of life by adopting all aspects and rituals of the new faith, whereas others avoided some of them.

In sum, this chapter has examined postconversion changes in terms of religious practice, relationships, outlook and other factors. Most of those interviewed reported changed outlooks, and feelings of purpose. Changes were seen to be ongoing, but related to the cultural context of Britain. Preconversion social ties had not been severed.



**CHAPTER SIX**

**CONVERSION THROUGH SUFISM**

## **A: SUFISM: THE AGENT OF ISLAM**

Sufism is believed to have been the principle agent in attracting non-Muslims to Islam throughout history (Levtzion, 1979: 17). This seems also to be true for conversion of Westerners to Islam in our time (Gerholm, 1988: 264-5) although there is no quantitative data available. Throughout this study, either through observations or interviews, evidence was found to suggest that Sufi groups in Britain may be attracting more converts than other Muslim groups in Britain. (That is never to say that Sufis outnumber non-Sufis. It seems on the contrary that there are more converts who are not involved in Sufism than those who are.) However, 23 (32.8%) of the 70 who were interviewed for this study came to Islam through Sufism or are currently involved in Sufism. In this chapter the conversion experiences of the Sufi subjects as well as the two Sufi groups in Britain will be investigated. Before moving on to the Sufis' experiences, Sufism in the West and in Britain will be described and the basic doctrines of Islamic Sufism (see Nicholson, 1963, Trnningham, 1971, Chittick, 1983 and 1989, Shah, 1980, Lings, 1981) will be presented.

### **1- Sufism in the West**

Sufism has always been an important concept in the West. It is widely believed that in Europe and America the spiritual nature and mystical vision of esoteric Sufism accounted for the success of Islam. There are tens of Sufi groups in Europe, Britain and the United States (Haddad and Lummis, 1987: 22, 171). In some cases, immigrants affiliated to Sufi orders brought over their own brand of Sufism. In other cases, groups sprang up as part of the recent interest in Asian religions which spawned in the West appealing especially to the disenchanted youth of the 1960s and 1970s, and they were able to attract many converts to Islam (Shah, 1980: 21, Yusuf, 1989: 82). One of the two Sufi groups (in Britain) which this study includes was started by a British convert, 'Abd al-Qādir as-Sufi, as will be examined later in detail. Apart from the Sufi groups there are also Sufic organisations and centres studying Sufism and disseminating information about it. Among them are *The Mawlānā Centre* and *The Society For Sufi Studies* in London, and *Muhyiddīn Ibn al- Arabī Society* in Oxford.

Hundreds of people in the modern Western world, while claiming to be Sufis, maintain that Sufism is independent of any particular religion (Lings, 1981: 16). In Britain there are those who believe that Sufism is not confined solely to Islam. Inna Tweedie, for example, a Soviet born mystic teacher, based in Willesden Green, North London, believes that she is a Sufi but not a

Muslim and asserts that Sufism and Islam do not necessarily go hand in hand <sup>1</sup> Inna Tweedie holds regular meetings in which she gives talks on Sufism which are attended by many British people *Subud* <sup>2</sup> is another Sufi-like movement known to thousands in the West, but it is not considered within the boundaries of Islam by authorities (see Shah, 1980 21) on Islamic Sufism on the basis that in its current presentation it has diverted from the original Islamic Sufi teaching though its procedure is mainly based upon *Naqshbandiyyah-Qaḍiriyyah* methods

The stories of some contemporary European intellectuals as to how Sufism attracted them are quite well-known throughout the Muslim world Among them the French philosopher René Guénon, English mystic Martin Lings, and Swiss intellectuals Frithjof Schuon and Titus Burckhardt may be cited They sought in the Muslim East a model for a life of wisdom, a contact with supra-sensory realities and also with ancestral secrets handed down by a long line of initiates (Rodinson, 1988 73) On a more popular level one finds Sufi brotherhoods attracting many young people, often with a background in left-wing politics <sup>3</sup> This political background is particularly apparent in the case of the Muslim community in Spanish Granada In the one-time Arab quarters of Albaicín, overlooking Alhambra, a group of 700 young Muslim converts have gathered to form an almost self-sufficient community dedicated to the 'return of Islam to Andalusia' <sup>4</sup>

## 2- The Doctrines of Sufism

To the majority of the scholars, the word Sufi is traceable to the Arabic word, pronounced *soof*,<sup>5</sup> which literally means 'wool' referring to the material from which the simple robes of the early Muslim mystics were made These, it is further claimed, were made of wool in imitation of the dress of Christian anchorites who abounded in the Near and Middle East (Shah, 1980 14) According to those who believe that Sufism is associated with Islam, Sufism is the name given to the mystical movement within Islam, a Sufi is a Muslim who dedicates himself to the quest after mystical union with his Creator Its aim and its end could be summed up as direct knowledge of transcendent truths (Lings, 1981 7) Sufis hold that existence is not independent, but is of God, that besides

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<sup>1</sup> Inna Tweedie once argued her point on a TV programme called "Sufism The Heart of Islam" screened on Channel 4 on 18 December 1990

<sup>2</sup> *Subud* was founded by an Indonesian, Muhammad Subuh (1901-1987), in 1934 It is described as "a way to make contact with Power of God, the Great Life Force " It is neither a kind of religion nor a teaching, but a spiritual experience awakened by the Power of God leading to spiritual reality free from the influence of passions, heart and mind In the *Subud* meeting, called *latihan* , the member waits for certain experiences, believed to be the working of God within him

<sup>3</sup> L. Rocher and F. Cherqaoui, *D'une foi l'autre Les conversions à l'islam en Occident*, Paris Seuil, 1986, 147-148, cited by Gerholm, 1988 264

<sup>4</sup> L. Rocher and F. Cherqaoui, *Ibid*, 175-186, cited by Gerholm, 1988 265

<sup>5</sup> *Soof* = wool, externalists in the East and West have often adopted this etymology, which therefore often appears in reference books as the derivation

the existence of God there is no real existence and man<sup>6</sup> is a reflection of the existence of God (ad-Darqawi, 1979 53, 85) The verse "Verily we are for God and verily unto Him we are returning" (the Qur'ān, 2 156) forms the basis of the whole system of Sufistic speculation Man is believed to have an inheritance, namely the Spirit of Humanity which was breathed by God into man directly from Himself (the Qur'ān, 15 29)

The Sufi teaching includes that mankind has certain capabilities and capacities and it teaches the method of developing the higher, perceptual capacity inherent in human beings (Deikman, 1979 182) The Sufis claim that a certain kind of mental and other activity can produce, under special conditions and with particular efforts, a higher working of the mind, leading to special perceptions Not surprisingly, in consequence, the word Sufi has been linked by some with the Greek word for divine wisdom (*sophia*) and also with the Hebrew cabbalistic term *Ain Sof* (the absolutely infinite) (Shah, 1980 14) Since man is composed simultaneously of body and soul, perfection requires that attention should be paid to both aspects of man In Islam, there are certain external duties, such as prayer and fasting, and internal duties, such as sincerity and freedom from egoism Sufism is primarily a training for this latter aspect of life In Sufism one is required to become a disciple of a shaykh

The entire structure of the philosophy of Sufism in Islam is founded on three basic concepts *shari'ah* (outward law), *tanqah* (the spiritual path) and *haqiqah* (the Reality) (see Chittick, 1989 260) These are the three levels of spiritual training The law is an outward dimension (*zahir*) of the Reality while the Reality (*haqiqah*) is the inward dimension of the Law The first level, *shari'ah*, is the level of I and you, you and I It concerns men's relationship to one another, and all of the outward laws of Islam Without this level man does not become purified to a state where he can actually walk the path Then comes the level of *tanqah* That is the stage where one reaches a state of purity high enough to walk on the path and to endeavour to return to one's source That is exemplified in the words "I am you and you are me" which means every time I look at you, I see something in you that reflects me Then comes the final level, *haqiqah* That is a stage where there is no I, there is no you, there is only Him, God, the Reality Though the first level is a precondition to the following stages in Islamic Sufism it is these latter stages what makes Sufism distinguishable It is the inner mystical aspect of religion which is the main concern of the Sufi

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<sup>6</sup> The term 'man' is used in the generic sense of human of either gender

In Islam Sufism represents practically the only attempt to break through the idea of the barren transcendence of God which is a characteristic of Orthodox Islam <sup>7</sup> In Rūmī's *Mathnawī* <sup>8</sup> (1207-1273) one finds words which one could hardly expect to belong to a Muslim which talk about 'Love' which caused the universe to be. This view of Islamic Sufism is closer to that of Christianity, for Christianity seeks to combine the immanence and the transcendence of God, which is fundamentally a question of choice between the 'outward' and the 'inward', or between the world and God (Schuon, 1970: 121). The logos theology of the Sufis does not, however, depart from orthodoxy in its perception of God as impersonal. For the orthodox, God is impersonal transcendence, for the Sufi He is impersonal immanence. That is to say, in Sufism the personal quest becomes absorption into the divine, but within orthodoxy the emphasis is on submission to *sharī'ah*. However, this is not to suggest that the Sufis neglect the *sharī'ah*, but their spiritual quest lies in a different direction (Trimingham, 1971: 141).

The whole of Sufism rests on the principle that when the individual self is lost, the Universal is found. In other words, spiritual ecstasy affords the only means by which the soul can directly communicate and become united with God. The two highest stages of spiritual development are *fana'* (annihilation or extinction) and *baqa'* (subsisting or immortality in the Real). *Fana'* means self-negation, or negation of the earthly tendency, and *baqa'* refers to retention of spiritual existence, or extraction of evil qualities. At this stage a Sufi's heart becomes a passive medium for the divine will. He lives as a second person without selfish interest. Unlike *Nirvana*, which is merely the cessation of individuality, *fana'*, the passing-away of the Sufi from his phenomenal existence, involves *baqa'*, the continuance of his real existence or union with the divine life (see Nicholson, 1963: 59, 149).

Self-knowledge is one of the bedrocks of the Sufi teaching. The root of the knowledge of God is knowledge of self. One acquires this self-knowledge not by means of intellect, and the ordinary or external knowledge, but by the personal experience of travelling inwardly with a spiritual guide. One of the fundamental elements in Sufi teaching is self-mortification which is killing one's lower-self (*nafs*: ego, evil self, the seat of passion and lust). In order to reach God one must let the lower-self go as it constitutes the greatest obstacle to the attainment of union with God. The Sufi is initially devoted to bringing the lower-self under control, so that the individual ceases to be a prey to inner urges and outward stimuli. This is not to say that one ceases to respond to such things, but that he now responds in a different way, 'being by choice' rather than

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<sup>7</sup> Islam preponderantly accepts the transcendent law-giver, but fears of the doctrine of man made in the image of God.

<sup>8</sup> See R. Nicholson's edition of *Mathnawī*, London: Luzac, 1933, Book 5, line 2185ff, see also Chittick, 1983.

being controlled by appetites (see O'Halloran, 1980: 24). God has given mankind bad and good characteristics and free will to choose between evil and good. So the goal of the Sufi path is to transform any unrestrained characteristics into beneficial ones.

Sufi Muslims believe that religion is not only words, but it is also taste. This taste can be gained through *dhikr*<sup>9</sup> (remembrance of Allah) which is a method of repeating the names of Allah or some religious formula e.g. "Glory to Allah", "There is no God but Allah", accompanying the mechanical intonation with an intense concentration of every faculty upon a single word/phrase. Sufis attach great value to this irregular litany, which enables them to enjoy uninterrupted communion with God (Nicholson, 1963: 45). They regard *dhikr* as the key stone of practical religion because through *dhikr* one acquires peace of mind, and a peaceful calm descends during *dhikr*.

The introduction of the idea of gnosis into Islam is the result of Sufi doctrine. Sufis distinguish three organs of spiritual communication: the heart (*qalb*), which knows God, the spirit (*ruh*), that loves Him, and the inmost ground of the soul (*sirr*), which contemplates Him (Nicholson, 1963: 68). It is by keeping the heart pure of worldly attachment that the human being can approach the Creator. Basing itself on love of God, Sufism consists of ethical qualities and rules of conduct. It teaches humbleness, altruism and service to other creatures of God. If someone confronts the Sufi, he is advised to avoid this confrontation, which reminds one of the "turn the other cheek" notion in Christianity. Sufism seems to have played an important peace-making role in settling disputes on religious differences, for Sufis have always laid great emphasis upon actions and public service rather than upon dogmatism. Sufi masters demonstrated their respect for the members of all religions in a practical way which had an important effect on establishing mutual respect and also in attracting people to their movement. In addition to these qualities Sufism has always actively promoted and supported the idea of equality among people by breaking down social barriers (Homayouni, 1990: 9-10).

## Conclusion

Nicholson (1963: 2), in his book, *The Mystics of Islam*, writes "If Judaism, Christianity and Islam have something in common in spite of their deep dogmatic differences, the spiritual content of that common element can best be appreciated in Jewish, Christian and Islamic mysticism, which bears equal testimony to that ever-deepening experience of the soul when the spiritual

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<sup>9</sup> *Dhikr* can be described as the technique of rhythmic breathing, with silent or audible ejaculation of divine names and phrases. It may be either spoken or silent, but it is best, according to the usual opinion, that the tongue and mind should cooperate.

worshippers, whether he be a follower of Moses or Jesus or Muhammad, turns whole-heartedly to God " Why would then someone, say, from the Christian tradition, take an interest in Sufism? Though all the great types of mysticism have something in common, each is marked by peculiar characteristics resulting from the circumstances in which it arose and flourished Sufis regard Jesus as their exemplary *par excellence* and they insist that Jesus was one of them Sufi writings have abundant literature containing references to teaching of Jesus and other Prophets For example, the famous Sufi Rūmī in his *Mathnawī*, is intensely interested in retelling the tales of the prophets Jesus is one of his favourites (Renard, 1987 55) His interest in Jesus is not the doctrinal matters which cause conflict between Muslims and Christians like the crucifixion of Jesus, but what the life and deeds of Jesus bring to mind about the believer's hopes for a relationship with God So this kind of approach taken by Sufis is immensely significant in the sense that a potential convert from a Christian background feels at home when he finds out that the sort of themes with which he is familiar are also of great importance to Sufis

## **B: SUFISM AND NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN THE WEST**

Since the 1970s new religious groups have gained widespread attraction in the western world. It is estimated that from several hundred thousand to as many as several million young people have joined these groups in America alone (Rochford, et al, 1989: 57). As well as the groups emerging from the Judeo-Christian tradition, Westerners have also shown enthusiasm for the religious movements brought from the East. In his study of Eastern religions in America Cox (1979: 10) describes how these movements are springing up:

" Within twenty blocks of the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Boylston Street, forty or fifty different neo-Oriental religious movements thrive. A few blocks west stands the Zen center. In the other direction, in the basement of a hospitable Episcopal church, the Sufi dancers meet twice a week to twist and turn like legendary whirling dervishes in a ritual circle dance, chanting verses from the Koran, the Muslim Holy book, in atonal Arabic. A few blocks to the northeast is the Ananda Marga center. A few blocks to the south the headquarters of the Hare Krishnas. The clean-shaven followers of the young guru Maharaj Ji's Divine Light Mission have a meeting place ten blocks southeast. "

Britain also has been a fruitful country for the new religious movements. At least 400 new religions are reported to have emerged in Britain since 1945 (Clarke, 1984: 2). In 1985 Stark listed 153 cult movements operating in England. The rate Stark found for England and Wales is 3.2 cult movements per million population, which is substantially higher than the American rate of 2.3. Stark also found that in Europe, Britain has also the highest number of Indian and Eastern cult centres and communities totalling 146 (England and Wales). This finding may be evidence for the weakness of conventional faith in Britain and a sign of the greater degree of the secularisation of Britain compared to other European countries, as Stark (1985: 334) found considerable evidence that cults abound in the most secularised parts of Europe.

Some of the Sufi groups in the West, as Cox reported above, are treated as NRMs. During this study, evidence was found that there are considerable similarities between conversion to Islam through Sufism and new religions, but by no means all. Furthermore evidence was also found that those who converted to Islam through Sufism have usually tried some other Eastern religions. Therefore before drawing the similarities and differences between Sufi groups and new religions it is useful to classify the NRMs in order to see where these Sufi movements stand in comparison.

It is necessary to distinguish those NRMs which remain in accordance with the prevailing religious beliefs of denominational religion, and those which adopt beliefs that are antagonistic to it like Buddhist, Hindu, or Muslim belief. Robbins, et al (1978: 101) argue that two main types of



response to the "decline of civil religion" can be observed in the new religions the emergence of dualistic movements (or dualistic civil religion sects) and monistic movements. Dualistic movements include cults like the Unification Church and Children of God. They reaffirm elements of traditional moral absolutism in an exaggerated and strident manner and recognise a separate realm of "sacred" setting this realm off from the secular or profane. They articulate a protest against the ambiguity, relativism and permissiveness of modern culture, and reaffirm a 'theocentric ethical dualism'. Monistic movements cover groups such as Meher Baba, Scientology, Hare Krishna, and Divine Light Mission. They insist on organising the whole of life around some special revelation and verbalise a "vision of the universe in which there is an ultimate metaphysical unity or 'oneness' which dissolves polarities and imparts an ultimately illusory or epiphenomenal quality (*Maya*) to the material world". Monistic movements mostly consist of groups which promise enlightenment through veneration and emulation of leaders who are regarded as exemplars of advanced consciousness (Robbins, et al, 1978: 102, 105, see also Warner, 1985: 199).

In his study of NRMs Wallis (1984) classifies the new religions into three types regarding their 'orientations to the world' as world-rejecting, world-affirming, and world-accommodating. The **world-rejecting** movements are much more recognisably religious than the world-affirming type. Their rejection of the world embraces secular institutions. They deny the conventional distinction between a secular and a religious realm. They possess a clear conception of God and an uncompromising set of moral demands. Krishna Consciousness and the Unification Church can be cited among others. The world-rejecting sects require a life of service to the guru or prophet and to others who likewise follow him. Long hours of proselytising on the street or distributing the movement's literature or unpaid domestic duties for leaders or other members and an arduous round of devotional ritual before the deities are characteristics of this type of religion.

On a philosophical level Sufism may be regarded as world-rejecting as it sees no reality other than God. But this theory is not applied in the sense of denying the world, except for extreme cases of some mystics in early Islam. Sufism may rather be described as otherworldly oriented rather than this worldly. The communal life-style which is characteristic of world-rejecting movements is not visible in Sufism, and it is not a characteristic of the Sufis in Britain except for the early days of the movement of 'Abd al-Qādir as-Sufi in the seventies. The devotional ritual before the deities and proselytisation have no place in Sufism. However, like members of such movements Sufis kiss each other and hug in greetings and hold hands with other members. A collective identity is fostered by various means, as in some of the world-rejecting religions, including a common mode of dress and appearance such as having beard.

The **world-affirming** new religions cover groups such as Transcendental Meditation and Nichiren Shoshu. The style of this type of movement lacks most of the features traditionally associated with religion. It may lack any developed theology or ethics, and it may have no church or collective ritual of worship. This type of movement claims to possess the means to enable people to unlock their physical, mental and spiritual potential without the need to withdraw from the world, means which are readily available to virtually everyone who learns the technique or principle provided. In world-affirming movements, the social order is not viewed as entirely and irredeemably unjust, nor society as having departed from God as in the world-rejecting case. The beliefs of these movements are essentially individualistic.

The form of dhikr in Sufism is almost equivalent to meditation and some sort of chanting or reciting certain words found in the world-affirming religions. The Sufi groups differ in that members are required to be of a certain religion, namely Islam, practised in the member's daily life whereas this is not necessary in world-affirming new religions. Sufism shares some literature with this type of religion such as self-realisation and self-liberation. It differs also in recognition of the fact that, although world-affirming movements pursue transcendental goals they lay little or no stress on the idea of God or transcendent spiritual entities, nor do they normally engage in worship.

The **world-accommodating** new religions draw a distinction between the spiritual and the worldly. Religion is not construed as a primarily social matter, rather it provides solace or stimulation to personal, interior life. It has relatively few implications for how that life should be lived, except that it should be lived in a more religiously inspired fashion. They feel something lacking in the spiritual lives of people. Their orientation is not so much a protest against the world or society, but a protest against prevailing religious institutions in the West. Neo-Pentecostalism, or the Charismatic Renewal Movement are examples of world-accommodating new religions.

Sufism seems to share with world-accommodating new religions a dissatisfaction with mainstream prevailing religious institutions. Wallis asserts that *Subud* falls into this category. Sufism also seems to share with this type of religion a recognition of the fact that there is an experimental element to the spiritual life and the spiritual dimension of life is not to be neglected.

As Cox (1979: 11) asks what has provoked this, especially Oriental religious revival? Who are the people who are involved in it? Why have they left either some more conventional Christian or Jewish form of religious life, or no religious life at all, to become seekers or adherents in these new spiritual movements? These questions about new religions are also applicable to conversion to Islam, particularly through Sufism in the West where spirituality weakened and people began to

look beyond the borders of the West for guidance embarking upon the search for an individual experience of the transcendent, and upon self-discovery

For many of the NRMs which came into being in the 20th century West, economic and political frustration have obviously played an important part. Some people rejected dominant values and life-styles and joined a group as an act of protest against the structure and culture of their society (Wallis, 1984: 48). There has been a general sense of dissatisfaction with (the) existing religion, either because it has reached a formalistic or decadent state, or because it no longer provides the answers to the questions people are asking (Holm, 1977: 78). In contrast to the scientific culture and psychology of the West, Eastern introspective (mystical) disciplines have focused on meaning and purpose but have employed a strategy in which the use of intellect and reason is neither central nor basic to the process of investigation. Oversecularisation has deprived human life of its spiritual significance. Life was departmentalised into different water-tight compartments, religious and secular, spiritual and material. Devoid of spiritual goals many people, especially youth turned from traditional religion and explored a radical alternative life-style and various means to alter consciousness (Melton, 1985: 292, Tipton, 1982: 177). The extreme descent into materialism and secularisation resulted in a reaction towards a spiritual and ethical life.

One of the interview questions was "Why do you think people tend to join new religions in the West?" They agreed on the fact that "more people are becoming increasingly fed up with the materialistic type of life." So it is evident that they turned in the hope of finding resources which may help revive what has been lost and correct the deep psychic and spiritual imbalances of the West. In spite of technological advancement and overall material development the condition of man remains unsettled. Two centuries ago, the Age of Reason proclaimed that man's sovereign intellect would solve everything. Today, the more that people think, the less seems to be the value of the intellect itself. These facts, as Wilson (1976: 99, 104-108) puts, "have opened the door to many a cult." So it is claimed by so many that the NRMs have, in substantial measure, developed in response to, and as attempts to grapple with the consequences of rationalisation (Cox, 1979: 100).

Despite great differences in substance and in detail among these movements, a notable feature of many of them is their appeal to mysticism or to some kind of mystical experience. They offer direct frequent experience of God, or union with God, or Ultimate Reality, and from the accounts of the converts to these movements it appears that they were attracted by the promise of such experience (Jantzen, 1990: 10). Apart from mystical experience, several elements

common to new religions may be identified <sup>10</sup> They are (1) Moral norms and judgement, (2) refusal of intellectual approach to religion, (3) surrender on the part of the disciple, (4) authority (charisma) on the part of the guru or master, (5) suspension of doubt and criticism, (6) emphasis on the millenium, and (7) missionary dimension With some differences in their application, these elements are to be found in Sufism, as it will be illustrated below For instance, a "missionary dimension" exists in Sufism, but not in the sense of carrying out an organised recruitment programme as understood by many new religions

Sufism shares more with Eastern religious movements than it shares with other new religions regarding its mystical inclination and philosophical structure Cultivating a deeper relationship with God through spiritual practice and surrender is common to both most Eastern NRMs and Sufism Along this path one needs a spiritual guide to come closer to God The final sacrifice in Divine Light Mission, for example, is "mortification of the ego" (Downton, 1980 383) As in Sufism, it is believed that the ego is the chief obstacle to peace Like Sufism, in many Eastern religious movements spiritual training is believed to increase feelings of self-regard and self-confidence, while it reduces the sense of guilt for one's misdeeds, negative feelings, and desires through the process of becoming emotionally detached from the negative features of the ego (Downton, 1980 389) In most Eastern religious movements there are techniques or practices corresponding to dhikr derived from ancient traditions, such as special breathing and certain forms of yoga and meditation Sufism and some new religions set certain rules and guidelines for any member involved which bring about the disciplining of everyday life To cite an example, there are basic rules of conduct which all members must observe in Hare Krishna such as no gambling, no intoxicants, and no illicit sex (Enroth, 1977 21) The rules are also absolute basics in Sufism

### **1- Resemblance Between Sufis and New Religious Movements' Members with regard to Their Background**

The observations and interviews with Sufis disclosed that they share a similar background with people involved in NRMs to a certain extent. Some of the best-known characteristics of the membership of the NRMs are that they tend to consist largely of middle-class youth (Johnson, 1977 40, Barker, 1989 14), predominantly male and usually unmarried (Barker, 1984 206, 234) These generalisations seem to apply to the Sufi converts interviewed However, the average age of conversion tends to be late twenties for Sufis (the average conversion age is 28 6) Among the

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<sup>10</sup> See P. Clarke, "Religion: Old and New in the 1990s", paper presented at the conference on "The future of Theology and Religious Studies: The Agenda for 1990s" sponsored by Department of Theology and Religious Studies, King's College London on 25 October 1990, see also Clarke, 1984 1

Sufi converts there is a preponderance of people from middle class<sup>11</sup> backgrounds with 69.6 percent against 30.4 percent from working class backgrounds. Of the 23 Sufi converts, 14 (60.9%) were single, and 9 (39.1%) were married or divorced at the time of conversion.

There are more significant similarities regarding the backgrounds of people who joined new religions (Deutsch, 1975, 1978, Galanter, et al, 1979, Galanter, 1982, Rochford, et al, 1989) and that of Sufis in terms of their psychological state such as previous involvement in therapy, preinvolvement feelings of anxiety and discouragement about life, and past experience with drugs and alcohol. Using drugs, before commitment to NRMs, is characteristic of many movements. It is found that persons who have used marijuana or LSD three or more times are twice as likely to have become participants in NRMs than persons who have either never used these drugs or used them less intensely (Bird and Reimer, 1983: 228). Rochford, et al (1989: 67), studying 214 Hare Krishna members found that only 13 percent of the devotees reported no previous use of drugs or alcohol, 80 percent had previously used marijuana, and 62 percent had taken hallucinogens such as "LSD". Of the 23 Sufis, 15 (65.2%) reported use of drugs such as marijuana and hallucinogens like LSD when they were younger or prior to conversion.<sup>12</sup> One of the young Sufi interviewees who recently became Muslim and gave up taking drugs said "I encourage young people to smoke cannabis and take acid because a lot of converts used to be hippies, and used to take a lot of acid. Acid puts you in a different world and into a different situation." By this statement he meant that those who take drugs are more likely to convert and he hoped for conversion of more people. As for the use of alcohol, 12 (52.2%) Sufis reported previous excessive use of alcohol. George was an alcohol addict beset by despair, and eager for a solution, as he pointed out:

" I realized that I had a drinking problem and I got to a stage where I was laying a bottle of rum under the bed and picking up the bottle and drinking in the morning before I even got out of the bed. So I remember going to see the priest to seek help and the first thing he did was to offer me a drink. So I thought I don't think I would have got any help from him."

The rate of previous drug-use seems to be higher among members of Eastern religious movements such as Hare Krishna, Divine Light Mission, Meher Baba, and Ananda Marga than it is for others (Rochford, et al, 1989, Galanter and Buckley, 1978, Nordquist, 1978). It is, therefore, often discussed whether "the tide of Eastern spirituality in the seventies was the successor of the psychedelic upsurge of the sixties?" Many of the young devotees involved in these movements studied by Cox (1979: 32) believed that it was, and offered their own experience as evidence. Investigators of new religions concluded that the explosion of movements, therapies and cults

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<sup>11</sup> 'Middle class' here covers upper and lower-middle class too.

<sup>12</sup> Only three (13%) reported use of drugs prior to conversion.

reflects the 'crises of meaning' of the sixties and the revolt against technical solutions and utilitarian individualism (Bellah, 1976 341, Anthony and Robbins, 1982 217) As Downton (1980 384) argued, through psychedelic experiences, spiritual frames of reference changed for many of these young people. Psychedelics revealed a powerful energy animating life which they came to see as spiritual in nature which challenged their Judeo-Christian conception of God as a human form and made them more sympathetic to the Eastern view of God as energy. Then they were attracted to Eastern spiritual beliefs and began experimenting with meditation, chanting and yoga as spiritual practices, for they had been spiritually awakened through their use of drugs. Their successful experiences with those techniques made them disenchanted with drugs. Also, at this time, a new set of social norms was developing within the counterculture community, discouraging the use of drugs and putting a higher value on natural ways of "getting high", like meditation. Already disillusioned with drugs, they welcomed the emergence of a new spiritual community within the counterculture. Now psychedelic experiences were replaced by meditation-like experiences which takes the form of dhikr in Sufism. The accounts of the Sufi subjects on their experiences with drugs substantiate the above presentation. Alan said:

"When I was a young man of 18-19 I was what other people called a "hippie". For me it was fun. I didn't need to go out and take life very seriously. I took things very seriously like painting and playing music and having fun. Incompleteness was something that I felt. I found that I was reading a lot about things that suggested a greater reality than all I could see about me because what I could see about me was quite small. And I had been doing things and experimenting with mind-expanding drugs through which I had actually been seeing that there was an awful lot to Reality, there was much more than at first glance. There was much much bigger things going on than I was aware of, and I wanted to know what those things were."

Alan now feels that he knows the "Reality", and the answers to life's basic questions:

"Islam has given me absolute hope, hope of Reality. I now know what "Reality" is. I know the answers that all the mystics are always talking about. What greater mystery is there to know than Allah? I know the answer to the question "what is the meaning of life?", we had come from Allah and we are going back to Allah. So what more do I need to know? We are created beings. That's what our purpose is. Otherwise if we didn't believe that, there would be no purpose, we would be just an extraordinary accident like a lot of people think. I know we are not that."

As is often argued by the investigators of the NRMs, the use of drugs by young people joining new religions suggests some degree of alienation from the dominant culture and a general willingness to experiment with alternative forms of consciousness, life-styles, and belief systems. The same research by Rochford, et al (1989) revealed that 48 percent of the Hare Krishna members admitted to feeling "discouraged and/or anxious about life" prior to becoming a Krishna devotee. More than a third reported taking part in therapy, or participating in psychological groups and movements. Studies on other new religions such as the Unification Church and the Divine

Light Mission testify to the findings on Hare Krishna (Deutsch, 1975, Galanter and Buckley, 1978) The interviews with Sufis revealed that 6 (26%) reported participating in therapy, or taking part in psychological groups prior to their conversion 16 (69.5%) Sufis acknowledged that they had feelings such as incompleteness, aimlessness, purposelessness and unworthiness

Most investigators, irrespective of the religious group that they have studied, agree that religious conversions may be psychologically beneficial (Joel, 1969, Galanter, et al, 1979, Galanter, 1982, Ullman, 1988) Rochford, et al (1989: 69) reviewed 10 different studies of cults, finding evidence of psychological impairment among members in order to assess the claims that brain-washing techniques used by these groups have pathological consequences resulting in members being unable to freely leave the cult They particularly examined two points (1) whether the psychological impairment found was an outcome of cult involvement or a condition which appears to have predated cult participation, and (2) what, if any, influence did the cult have in either further promoting psychological disorder or relieving symptoms and overall levels of impairment? Of the 10 studies reviewed, seven suggested that the symptoms uncovered were attributable to causes which predated cult involvement Two argued that the presence of symptoms may be the result of both preinvolvement influences and cult indoctrination practices Only one study openly argued that cult involvement was the direct cause of disturbance found among members The same seven studies also found evidence that involvement with these cults reduced preexisting symptoms and increased the sense of well-being Two studies concluded that involvement reduces preexisting symptoms, but causes other sources of disorder Only one study, again, revealed that involvement caused psychological impairment (Rochford, et al, 1989: 71) These studies are backed up by Transcendental Meditation's literature which claims that TM is practised and recommended by over 600 British medical doctors who believe that it contributes to the prevention and alleviation of stress-related illnesses (Barker, 1989: 26)

The present findings on Sufis lend support to the conclusion reached by the majority of the researchers on two points investigated by Rochford, et al *First*, the majority of the Sufi subjects reported previous psychological disturbances such as depression, meaninglessness, and distress resulting from family problems or other factors, as will be discussed later at length *Second*, they reported that these predating symptoms were reduced and their psychological well-being improved following involvement in the Sufi group However, these findings and conclusions do not explain conversion exhaustively, for there are those, though not many, who were satisfied with their previous life, and were in good mental and physical health They may have felt a sense of incompleteness in the society, but discontentment with their station in life or with the values of the society had not crystallised sufficiently to instigate their journey to Sufism

The people recruited to the cults were mostly social isolates, people whose prime deprivation was precisely a lack of social ties (Stark and Bainbridge, 1980a: 1377). So when they joined a cult these people did not have social bonds that could have restrained them from doing so. Many Sufi subjects reported that they suffered from the same malaise, they lacked family ties or friends, whereas in many non-Sufi converts' cases their parents severely rejected them upon their conversion to Islam and were upset with them for some time before coming to terms with it. Snow, et al (1980) examining previous social networks among ashram members found that a very small percentage of them had been deeply involved with what they were doing in the larger society. Though most of the Sufi subjects had finished their formal or higher education and had jobs before they found Sufism only a few reported career aspirations that would have kept them at their jobs. Thus, for the most part, they neither needed nor desired more than their attenuated attachment to society. They had made a psychic as well as a social withdrawal, and even if most at this point were in their mid-twenties, they were still going through a "psycho-social moratorium" normally associated with adolescence (Erikson, 1968: 128-135, 242, Snow, et al, 1980), as Freddie reported:

"In my early adulthood I went through a bit of a difficult period of lacking a sense of identity. Being unsure of myself and lacking a sense of purpose and direction. That was from 16 to 25. I was very politically involved about 8 to 10 years with socialists. That I suppose was to do with looking for answers through politics trying to change this world and thereby trying to change my life."

When people join a religious cult they first change their behaviour by adopting a new role. The changes may be sweeping and dramatic, but they are not necessarily supported by conviction. The boundless faith of the true believer usually develops only after lengthy involvement in the cult's day-to-day activities. Some members go for months without ever resolving their doubts, yet they may still appear fully committed because outwardly they are acting the way they are expected to act (Baich, 1980: 143, Lofland and Stark, 1965: 874). This is true of the Sufis interviewed, as will be discussed in the section on Sufi/non-Sufi differences. One Sufi admitted that it took him five years to internalise the beliefs. The following account by William, a follower of Shaykh Nazim, describes how he felt in early days of his involvement:

"It is like you dive into the water for the first time trusting you will be brought up again. You don't know whether you are going to come up or not although you have seen other people diving and coming up. I have dived and I have come out again. That's how it is. You take the plunge."

Members of new religions see their life before membership as a spiritual journey and attribute their enlightenment to spiritual powers and give theological answers such as "Krishna called me here", "It was my karma" (Cox, 1979: 95), "God gave me a clear sign", or "God had been



guiding me throughout my life, preparing me for membership" (Barker, 1984. 255) The Sufi subjects' attributions are not of a different nature to recruits of new religions "my heart", "Allah has guided me", and "Shaykh's guidance" were some of the answers given

Having examined some resemblances between Sufism and new religions now some major differences between them will be pointed out in so far as member-group relationships are concerned

## **2- Contrast Between Sufism and New Religious Movements Regarding Member-Group Relations**

The Sufi groups do not circumscribe the lives of members. It is true that there are isolated and static Sufi groups in the West, but the Sufis in question are not identical with these types of groups. They have not set up an isolated, close-knit society, or moved to a Muslim country to live in a temple. They are still part of this society, and Britain is still their home.

Unlike most new religious groups, Sufi groups are not mobilised to recruit members. They do not develop recruitment strategies nor plan any organisational or ideological recruitment tactics for reaching out and contacting prospective recruits. Membership in the Sufi groups was not primarily a matter of what the organisation had done, but what individuals had done to attach themselves to the groups. Conversion through Sufism rejects the portrait of the "cult seeker" as the "passive", "innocent" bystander deceptively manipulated into a conversion. Though contact is sometimes a random event it usually comes about in three forms, (1) self-initiated contacts, where an individual seeks out a movement and/or its representatives or its literature, (2) contacts are made through social network ties with friends, acquaintances, and family members who belong to a movement, and (3) individuals come across Sufis for the first time during their journeys to Muslim countries in the Middle-East, Asia or Far-East. Many Sufi converts involved in this study first learned about Sufism from individuals. Since Sufis are not structurally closed and adherents are not cut off from their previous social relationships they are able to disseminate information about Sufism within their sphere of social relations on the basis of the social theory that suggests "the more isolated the group the less likely that social ties will operate as recruitment devices for the group" (Snow and Phillips, 1980: 431). Nevertheless, preexisting interpersonal relations or social networks, what Stark and Bainbridge (1980a) call "networks of faith", extended to non-members does not seem to have played so significant a role for the Sufis in the final stage since they committed themselves after a long period of experimentation and reasoning.

Now, one wonders "Why Sufism attracted these people?" "Why did many of them not settle in one of these religions and went on to Sufism?" To answer these questions it is worthwhile to review the above presentation emphasising why people get attracted to counter-culture in the western world

### **Conclusion**

As Burfoot (1983 148-153) discussed, an individual who is attracted to a counter-culture may go through the triple-process of differentiation, disenchantment, and alienation in western industrialised societies, which in the end separates the individual from the society. As a result of **differentiation** individuals become isolated in private and they may not fully be able to relate to the rest of the society. It is a process in which the possibility for personal satisfaction and meaning decreases within the existing social framework. Differentiation produces a fragmentation of meaning which results in a vast number of interpretations of the world. As there is no overall system that unifies these multiple meanings, exposure to multiple world views is experienced as an overload of information. This, in turn, can produce chronic cognitive dissonance among those who can find no way to put the self or society back together into a meaningful whole. Then comes the stage of **disenchantment** where the "irrational elements of meaning have been displaced from social action as a result of an increase in bureaucratisation, or rationalisation. The bureaucratic system disallows emotion within and between roles. Relationships are not between feeling people, but between functional rational offices. The ability to obtain personal meaning from these roles is thus reduced. Thus the fixed nature of bureaucracy and the inability to equate feeling with social action may serve to render this a fossilised, emotionally colourless social system. In other words, social actors in a bureaucratic world will become disenchanting. **Alienation** is the last stage where the tie between the individual and the society is broken. The social actor in this western, industrial society feels alienated. The individual may not be able to pull the self and society back together into a meaningful whole and the maintenance of identity within that social system may no longer be possible. However, once he has transcended the constraints of society, this lack of commitment may lead the individual to seek a new identity outside that social system. In fact, if there is no satisfaction for the self, in terms of alignment of meaning, feeling, and action within a social structure, it seems reasonable to search for satisfaction elsewhere. It is in this format that NRMs may arise and flourish, giving new identity and meaning to individuals. The life stories of the Sufis interviewed disclosed that most of them have gone through this triple-process at the end of which they found themselves looking for satisfaction from a counter-culture.

The members gained by Sufism in Britain are, to a greater extent, casualties from the failure and disintegration of the NRMs, particularly, as Robbins, et al (1978 101) call it, from "monistic movements" People who are drawn into Sufism are most likely to be from the group of people who have been progressively seeking to master spiritual and/or physical disciplines in order to achieve a state of enlightenment and self-harmony, often following the examples of a revered teacher or people who have been in search of meaning to their lives To achieve this end they got involved in Eastern religions that stress "inner" practices as a force for the regeneration and transformation of the individual, by means of which a true moral agency becomes possible But they discovered the view that no such world will ever be found and religious maturity meant learning to live in the complex world The Sufi converts interviewed expressed that it had been at this point that Sufism accompanied with Islam had come into the picture which offered them an overall system, a way of life based on moral and ethical values

To conclude, as elucidated above there are social, psychological and religious preconditions out of which NRMs in the West developed Sufism is no exception to this conclusion NRMs in the West, as Sharma (1985 123) puts, are filling the sense of spiritual emptiness, which is an area relatively neglected by Christianity They are meeting a religious need not met by the spiritual resources available to people Conversion to Islam through Sufism can be understood in these terms taking into account that by joining Sufi groups, in the first place, people are rejecting Western culture rather than the traditional religion which is part of its culture Needless to say, when the conventional or the existing old religions have lost vigour and no longer provide a product satisfactory to many, new faiths will move into the gap Nonetheless, one must be wary of any conclusion that implies Sufism is growing relative to other new religious groups as there are no available records of members joining or leaving It is not known how many so far joined in, stayed in or left What is known is that the Sufi groups claim that a few hundred Westerners have been drawn into their movement. Shaykh Nazim affirms that they were "less than the number of the fingers of two hands", while 'Abd al-Qādir's men were not more than a few when they started in the early seventies

Now, in the next two sections, two different Sufi groups, the group of Shaykh Nazim in London and that of 'Abd al-Qādir as-Sufi in Norwich will be examined respectively

## C: THE GROUP OF SHAYKH NAZIM

In Britain there are some English converts to Islam who associate themselves with Shaykh Nazim and claim to have entered Islam through the work of the Shaykh. Shaykh Nazim is a graduate of chemistry, around the age of 70, and a prominent figure within the *Naqshbandiyya Tanqah* (order). He is a Turkish-Cypriot, settled in North Cyprus, and regularly visits Britain.

The data on converts involved in Shaykh Nazim's group is based on the observations, conversations and formal interviews with 17 converts currently involved in the group. Observations were made during the last three *Ramadan* during which the Shaykh stays in London, in Peckham Mosque (South London) and Shaykh Nazim Mosque (North London) between 1990-1992, and in the East-West Centre throughout the year when the Shaykh was not in Britain, and the interviews were done in 1990-1991. While the Shaykh was in London his dhikr ceremonies, sermons and talks were followed in different places. Shaykh Nazim's books and transcriptions of his talks over the years also provided productive information.

The *Naqshbandiyya* rose in Central Asia and greatly influenced the development of the Indian and Turkish empires. Many authorities regard this as the earliest of all the mystical 'chains of transmission'. After Bahā'ad-Dīn Naqshband (d. 1389), one of the greatest personages of this school, it was known as the *Naqshbandiyya* (Shah, 1980: 141).

The Sufis can trace an unbroken chain (*silsilah*) of masters, going back to the source. It is this historical chain which provides the link, or channel by which "heavenly" knowledge, wisdom, and love can be transmitted. The last Grand-shaykh in the chain of *Naqshbandiyyah* is al-Daghistānī who passed away in 1973. With the death of the Grand-shaykh, Shaykh Nazim became the carrier of his transmission and *barakah* (grace or blessing) and marked as the 40th master in the chain. It is believed that there is a spiritual connection between the Grand-shaykh and Shaykh Nazim. This contact brings light, blessings and protection. So Shaykh Nazim expresses that his heart is connected to that of his Grand-shaykh.

### 1- Mission in Britain

Shaykh Nazim has been regularly visiting Britain for the month of *Ramadan* to stay around two months since 1973. He mainly stays in London, but occasionally goes to other places in England, Wales and Scotland for talks. During *Ramadan* when Shaykh Nazim is in London around

50 German<sup>13</sup> followers and some others from other European countries and America come to London and stay in Peckam mosque. While some stay for a few days/weeks most do not leave until the Shaykh leaves Britain. Everyday the Shaykh joins these people in the mosque after the late noon prayer until late night. He has conversations with them and answers their questions ranging from the topic of 'abortion' to the 'position of Jesus Christ in Islam'. With these people present Peckam Mosque witnesses prayer services every night, and dhikr ceremonies performed by a big crowd on Friday nights led by the Shaykh. After his stay in Britain he normally makes his way to Europe where he has European followers as well as lifelong Muslims. Among others Germany, France, Spain and Switzerland can be mentioned. He bears the label of "International" for he has disciples scattered around the world and his journey schedule varies from the United States to South-East Asia countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan. He is always welcomed by some Indian-oriented NRMs in the West. He is sometimes invited to their centres to deliver lectures. Ananda Marga Centre in North London is one of them. He once stayed for three days in the Babaji Centre in Switzerland to deliver talks in 1985 and his talks in the Babaji Centre were published under the title of *Secrets Behind the Secrets*.

The policy of the Shaykh travelling around the world and visiting his disciples is very much significant in the sense that in the usual tradition of Sufi orders disciples are supposed to visit their shaykh rather than the other way round. Shaykh Nazim explains why he comes to the West: "I have been trained to heal spiritual ailments with methods not known in these countries, and so I have been sent by spiritual centres to look after the Western countries."<sup>14</sup>

When the Shaykh is in Britain the group's activities reach its zenith. The Shaykh accelerates the activities, meetings, and talks as well as leading dhikr ceremonies and prayers. While he is away his followers are separated into subgroups, according to geographical location and gender. One of the subgroups is mainly made up of British converts. They regularly meet in the East-West Centre<sup>15</sup> to do dhikr on Friday nights. The dhikr ceremony starts after the late evening prayer and takes about two hours. When it is over the person who leads the dhikr, an English convert, gives a short talk about spiritual matters. Sometimes he answers questions generally from potential converts who are taking an experimental attitude towards Sufism. If there is a new comer, he explains what Sufism is all about, and sometimes the talks are centred round some aspects of Islam such as "tolerance in Islam" and "freedom of belief" in order to emphasise

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<sup>13</sup> Shaykh Nazim seems to be attracting German converts more than any other nationality and the growth of his mission seems to be faster in Germany than in Britain. Some converts agree that there is some sort of vacuum in Germany more so than in Britain.

<sup>14</sup> A Booklet by Sheikh Hisham titled "About Our Master Sheikh Nazim", nd.

<sup>15</sup> 188 Old St., London E1.

that Islam is not a violent religion as assumed in the West. The meeting ends with cold beverages and biscuits during which members find the chance to have conversations with one another and new comers. Dhikr, as the Sufis interviewed described, seems exotic and something different worth trying for the new comer. One convert expresses how he felt when he first went to the East-West Centre:

"I arrived and I was shown a place to sit down. And around 20 men came in, some of them quite old with big white beards and they all greeted each other and sat down as the lights turned off. And they started repeating some words which, I knew later, praise the Prophet Muhammad. And at this stage I closed my eyes and it was absolutely dynamic. I couldn't believe it."

## **2- Initiation to the Group**

In order to enter Shaykh Nazim's group, or any other Sufi group in general, the candidate must somehow make contact with a Sufi or books on Sufism, probably on some ordinary basis. It is usually the case that the individual is taken to dhikr ceremonies by a friend or acquaintance or he might be given the address of the place and invited to attend a dhikr ceremony. In the first days the potential convert is regarded as a visitor who is interested in Sufism. It is noticeable that the potential convert for some time is in a position of uncertainty with respect to his role behaviour until he learns and comes to accept the norms of the group. In the beginning the potential convert sits quietly and listens to the sounds and rhythms. Thereafter he receives explanations of the different elements of the dhikr and doctrines of Sufism. It is believed that heavenly emanations which nourish the soul are contained in the forms of sounds. The new comer may get involved in recitation in Arabic without going to the trouble of learning the Arabic script. He may also be advised to perform certain practices by reciting single dhikr words like "Allah" a specific number of times a day (see Owen, nd: 10-12).

Some of the esoteric literature is hard for the new comer to understand, and has its own technical terminology. Yet on the other hand, it is a canon of belief that a Sufi does not progress merely by passing through degrees and initiations, the "blessing" (*barakah*) must come upon him. There is something which is known as *barakah*, the power which, when contacted, will give the person more than the insight which he needs to know that he is at last on the way to fulfilment (see Brook-White, 1979: 266). Along the path, believe the Sufi converts, they get blessing. Such a convert is Robert who tells of his receipt of blessing: "I believe that a Shaykh is able to transmit something, the *barakah*, which in itself is helpful in this process."

During the summer of 1990 I did not attend the East-West Centre for about three months. Within three months there were two noticeable elements. First, there were new faces

introduced to the group. *Second*, the new converts were adapting more and more. One had grown a beard, another had taken off the ear-ring which is in general regarded as appropriate only for women in the Islamic tradition. It seemed that they were getting more involved in the *dhikr* and getting used to Arabic terms and religious language during conversations with one another.

In the course of his participation in the Sufi meetings it is always suggested that the potential convert should meet the Shaykh when he is in Britain. When he meets the Shaykh he psychologically feels that he should take *bay'ah* declaring him as his spiritual master. In the *bay'ah* ceremony a circle is convened and the candidate is brought from the antechamber by his sponsor and introduced to the Shaykh. He bows and kisses the hands of the Shaykh. Then after saying the *shahaadah* he is conferred a Muslim name by the Shaykh. With the *shahaadah* he takes the final act and he is regarded as a Muslim, and with the *bay'ah* he is made dependent on authority for direction. He is now called by his new name and made to feel that he is a Muslim as well as being a Sufi. However, it is usually the case that the potential convert spends at least a few months in the group before meeting the Shaykh and taking the *shahaadah*.

### **3- Dhikr and the Belief of Lower-self**

In *dhikr* gatherings in the East-West Centre the participants normally perform the obligatory late evening prayers and then forming a large circle in the centre of the floor - women also form a circle at the back of the same room - collectively engage in *dhikr*, under the guidance of the leader. Selections from the Qur'an are recited, God's names are repeated and the Prophet Muhammad is praised in a certain assigned way. When the Shaykh is in Britain *dhikr* ceremonies are held in Peckham Mosque.

There are different methods of performing *dhikr*. The one Shaykh Nazim's group practise is to sit and repeat the words by closing the eyes. The participants chant in unison in a loud voice while rhythmically swaying their bodies and rocking their heads rhythmically to and fro. The chanting gradually increases in tempo and involves the rapid inhalation and exhalation of breath. Among the words selected for recitation are "there is no god but Allah", and "*hoo*" <sup>16</sup>. Religious music is not employed in *Naqshbandiyya* during *dhikr* as it is in some other Sufi orders though it is assessed that music heard in the right way improves the approach to the consciousness (Shaykh Nazim, 1983-1984: 61).

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<sup>16</sup> In Arabic "*hoo*" means "he" which here refers to Allah.

The dhikr meetings, in addition to the ritual importance, are the crucial means for social interaction among the members, communion, commitment and the sense of sharing something with others are accomplished. With the dhikr, members assert, they sense a great peace and this sensation gives them relief and freedom and makes them feel better. They account that it brings them closer to God. Leonard said "It is an experience, how can you explain it. You need to drink tea to know what it tastes like. I get the taste and remember that one is always in His presence. I feel very much closeness to God and a lot of love." George has a different feeling.

"For me it is a method of purification. It is like during the day you build up all these things during the working life, it is like going into a room which is full of people who are smoking and you cannot smell in that smoke and you need to be washed of that smoke. Working in the world is very much like that, we pick up things. And I feel that dhikr is a method of cleaning that smell of the world away."

Folklore genres such as story telling, song and dance can provide an important medium of communication during all phases of missionary interaction. Several studies concluded that folklore can play a role as a supplemental instrument promoting the conversion process. Johnson (1976) found that many converts to Hare Krishna are first attracted by the chanting and music of the devotees of this movement. Likewise, Singer's (1980: 174) research on *Lubavicher Chassidim* group in Los Angeles revealed that folklore plays a significant role "in bringing nonpractising and nonbelieving Jews into the orthodox fold of this Jewish group". Although music or musical instruments are not employed in Shaykh Nazim's group, dhikr, converts recollect, was something they were fascinated by.

The theme of lower-self (*nafs* ego) is the bedrock of Shaykh Nazim's teaching and he always touches upon it in his talks. It is based on man having both a soul (*ruh*) from the heavens and ego from the earth. Man is perfect when these two are met in the right way by the soul having complete authority in a man's heart. Then there is a flow of divine energy (love, mercy, etc.) from the heavens, through man's heart to the beings of the earth so that man becomes the agent of the heavens on the earth and God's Will comes into being through man. (Sheikh Nazim, nd: 20ff)

According to this theory there is an ongoing antagonism between one's soul and ego. It is believed that through dhikr the soul overcomes the ego. Here soul represents heavenly or spiritual tendencies while ego represents worldly ambitions, all bad characteristics and desires. Shaykh Nazim always encourages people to overcome the ego. "Ego is either your horse or you are the horse of ego. If you overcome your ego, you can reach heaven by riding on it." He adds that one, particularly in our time, has to be trained to fight or control the ego. If one is not in control of his ego through training, it will destroy him quickly (Sheikh Nazim, 1987: 55). The Shaykh



recognises two kinds of ego desires legitimate and illegitimate. The physical being is attracted to food, drink and sexual life. One should give one's ego its legitimate rights and listen to some of its demands. Therefore the Shaykh urges new (single) Muslims to marry, for being unmarried cuts hearts off from satisfaction, as suppressed sexual desire is the biggest trouble-maker of the heart, robbing it of peace and contentment. If the mind, Shaykh Nazim asserts, dwells on sexual thoughts, Divine Lights are extinguished and a shroud of darkness is cast over the heart (Sheikh Nazim, 1983-1984: 45). His teaching on "ego" seems to be one of the essential elements appealing to converts. George recollected a story of the Shaykh on ego which he liked most:

"We went to Windsor Safari Park with Shaykh Nazim and some of the brothers. There was a big fenced area and we went to the fence and there was a warning notice there that when you actually enter this area not to open your windows or doors. We were driving around looking at the lions and they were looking at us." Then the Shaykh said, "There is one thing in man which is far more dangerous than those lions, and that is the ego. And it is like if we had opened the window or the door and one of those lions had jumped into the car, it would have been much easier to regain that situation than it would from the ego because the ego is more ferocious than the lion."

#### **4- Basic Teachings of the Shaykh Which Play Major Role In Attracting Converts and Some Features of the Group**

In his talks Shaykh Nazim always emphasises that people of this century, particularly western people, have become much more materialistically oriented and that the influence of religion in people's lives is diminishing. In one of his sermons<sup>17</sup> he addressed the congregation about the people of the world going astray from the way of God: "Mosques are empty, churches are empty, but pubs are full, satanic places are full." His talks are centred around the issue of the fact that we are living in a time when people have virtually ceased being interested in anything but their material existence and enjoyments, which is the illness of our times and certainly the main reason behind all the world's troubles (Sheikh Nazim, 1981: 96).

By and large, the approach taken by Shaykh Nazim towards other great religions of the world is not a hostile one. To him mankind is one extended family. We are all related, and, therefore, we share many characteristics, among them a great spiritual power hidden within our being (Sheikh Nazim, 1986: 62), and only the spiritual way of religions can find out this hidden power. He shows the significance and value of every revealed form as well as the necessity to follow and accept a religious tradition in its totality, which enables man to reach that Unity which in itself is formless. More specifically for Islam, he shows its "intermediate position" between Judaism, Christianity and the traditions of Asia. In this sense Sufism presented by the Shaykh seems to be a vehicle for an attempt to present something of cosmic importance to mankind. He

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<sup>17</sup> The sermon was addressed in the Shaykh Nazim Mosque (North London) on 3 May 1991.

says "You obey God whether through Judaism, Christianity or Islam Allah Almighty rewards people according to their intentions If a person is sincere and has good intentions, he will be rewarded by his Lord, no matter what his religion may be Don't hold your Lord's mercy any less than this " (Sheikh Nazim, 1986 57) As he holds these views he is welcomed by some Christians and Jews in Britain Once he addressed an audience of different religions at the London School of Economics<sup>18</sup> organised by the Islamic Society in collaboration with the chaplain and a rabbi from the same college In this meeting he said

"You must follow the methods prescribed by a great religion I am not going to tell you that you must follow this or that, all I am saying is that making a hodgepodge is useless Why? Keeping to the precepts of a world religion without being a fanatic guards you Faith and wisdom need protection, and you must learn what actions or practices may protect your treasures " (see also Sheikh Nazim, 1986 12-3)

Yet, though he praises Christianity and Judaism in front of the audiences of different religions he sometimes does not refrain from challenging them on the basis that "they are distorted and Islam is the best way to God "<sup>19</sup>

Smoking, though not prohibited, according to the Shaykh, is one of the greatest weaknesses someone can have, as it leaves its "victim" completely bereft of will-power He says "If one cannot cut himself off from the smoking habit, he cannot have the will-power to protect himself from falling under the control of his lower-self" (Sheikh Nazim, 1983-1984 57) This is the prime reason for asking the members to give up smoking, not because it is harmful to one's health or any other reason People, be it converts or lifelong Muslims, involved with him seem to have responded to his call on smoking Among the interviewees all but one who used to smoke before their involvement reported giving up smoking

In his talks and conversations with people around he always makes jokes He adorns his talks with teaching stones of the great Sufis of Islamic history which makes the atmosphere lively The secret which significantly lies behind his success in attracting converts seems to be his making Islam easy He believes that the differences in the conditions faced by converts should not be ignored (Sheikh Nazim, 1985-1986 95) and that Westerners should be given concessions and not be loaded down with instructions on the full level of worship, fasting, etc , required of a fully responsible Muslim He says

"If we are to present Islam in such a way, they will certainly think twice before committing themselves to Islam, as they are not prepared to instantly observe the whole of the law This is why

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<sup>18</sup> The meeting in London School of Economics was held in March 1991

<sup>19</sup> The Shaykh has once made this challenge in one of his Friday sermons in Sheikh Nazim Mosque in North London on 22 March 1991

so many Western people come to me and ask if it is possible to follow a Sufi way without embracing Islam. Because they view Islam as a gigantic mountain which they would be ordered to scale to the peak immediately, without training and equipment We lead people step by step There is a beginning and an end We must help people take the first step, if they don't take the first, they will never take the last " (Sheikh Nazim, 1984-1985 30)

Open-hearted tolerance and understanding towards new comers are always in operation in the group Shaykh Nazim's approach is flexible and he speaks to each in accordance with their understanding He never makes criticism on what they do and he is meticulous not to put Westerners off Freddie remembered how he enjoyed the attitude of the Shaykh after his conversion "When I became Muslim he told me to relax and take it easy, and not to blow my mind to become a devout Muslim overnight That was very important lesson for me in a way not to expect too much of myself very quickly "

The appearance of women in dhikr gatherings and activities is another significant aspect of the group The women join the activities and are represented in dhikr ceremonies sometimes in a separate place, sometimes in the same place situated at a relative distance to the men's circle This is quite important for the converts who come from a Christian background where they got used to a co-sex presence in church

As for the way the male members dress, the Shaykh forms the prototype, with his green robe, white turban, and beard The turban makes the Sufis more distinctive than other Muslims, be it converts or otherwise The Shaykh is very much in favour of his followers and other Muslims wearing turbans Almost all of the converts in the group wear the turban and sometimes the robe during dhikr and prayers in the mosque or in their homes, but not outdoors, for, they claim, people would stare at them if they were to do so, as people are unfamiliar with it Only two of the 17 Sufi subjects involved in Shaykh Nazim's group reported that they wear the turban and the robe all the time What is more significant about the dress of the group is that the nationalities of the members are usually distinguishable from the colours of their turbans In general, Germans wear purple, English wear green, and black members wear red turbans Green and white are commonly worn by all nationalities, e.g. one can see a black member wear a green turban, but none of the Germans would wear a red turban

## **5- Leader-Member Relations**

In Sufic orders obedience to one's shaykh has always been the distinctive mark of the follower He has to listen and obey (al-Suhrawardi, 1977 43) Even though what the shaykh says or does may seem inconsistent or even incomprehensible, it is believed to have a meaning or a secret Obedience to the Shaykh in the group of Shaykh Nazim is almost a must Though the

Shaykh is far away from his followers during most of the year he is considered to be present in the life of the followers. In all their acts and thoughts, they maintain their lives with him. Being away from the Shaykh seems to make little difference to the actions of the follower. Though people nearer to him are believed to get more, those away from him are also believed to get benefits from him by dreams, by spiritual communion, and by speaking heart to heart. When the Shaykh is in Cyprus some followers travel to Cyprus to visit and stay with him for a while.

Shaykh Nazim is the central figure who determines spiritual and structural guidelines and is the ultimate source of authority as well as being the supreme role model for his followers. He has got charisma and meets the definition of the charismatic leader by Weber (1968: 241ff). According to Weber the charismatic leader is "treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least specially exceptional powers or qualities. In addition to possession of endowments, Wallis and Bruce (1986: 107) add to the definition of the charismatic authority the "legitimacy to command, rebuke, praise or prescribe for others". The Shaykh also meets this additional definition. There is the sense of loyalty towards the Shaykh, which is both submissive and unquestioning.

Downton (1973: 222) in his *Rebel Leadership* argues that a major means for charismatic relationships to develop is through a psychological exchange of affection, encouragement and security on the part of the leader for deference and affection on the part of the follower. However, Downton believes that many of the most significant questions about the charismatic relationship can only be answered by psychological means. He uses Freudian theory (Freud, 1937: 195ff) to answer the question of how a charismatic relationship arises between a leader and his followers, placing the reason for the submission of the follower to the leader in conflicts between "id, ego and super ego", conflicts that tend to be aggravated by social changes that tax the capabilities of ego. He argues that the followers are suffering intolerable levels of anxiety or "inadequate identity" resolved through recourse to a charismatic leader who "becomes a parental figure to be obeyed during periods of stress" (Downton, 1973: 225). He finds a reversion to infantile patterns of behaviour, in which anxious followers regress to a state of submissiveness before a father figure. Downton infers too, much about the psychological condition of the people from disturbed social circumstances in which charismatic leaders characteristically find a role. Nevertheless, the fact that charisma often arises in conditions of social disruption does not entail that those who follow such a leader possess either inadequate identities or suffer intolerable levels of anxiety (see Wallis and Bruce, 1986: 130-1). The theory of Downton may well be applicable to the cases of some Sufi subjects, but it is not evident that one can generalise the theory for all. Furthermore one has to take into consideration that the charismatic qualities which the Shaykh is personally

perceived to have, played an important role only in a few people's cases. By and large, they learn to see Shaykh Nazim as a charismatic figure towards the end of the process or when the process is completed.

In a later paper Downton (1980: 386) argues why people follow the unconventional spiritual leaders or gurus, which seems more applicable to the Sufi converts interviewed. He puts forward the hypothesis that people who have ideal goals for themselves and the world end up having feelings of inadequacy and a sense of personal futility which lead them to psychological receptivity to the appeals of spiritual leaders who make promises of change. At first, they hope for enlightenment through personal effort, but they become disappointed by the almost imperceptible changes they seem to make on their own. The more they try to change, the more hopeless they feel. Their will seems puny and inadequate as they face the mysteries of the spiritual world and their goals for the future. Feeling incapable of changing themselves or understanding the spiritual mysteries they had discovered, many become ready to accept a spiritual teacher to guide them. Then they begin to search for a spiritual leader or a guru to follow and a spiritual community to join. Remember Alan's description of himself (quoted above) when he was young: "Incompleteness was something that I felt. I was reading a lot about things that suggested a greater reality than all I could see about me because what I could see about me was quite small and I wanted to know what those things were." The hypothesis of Downton confirms the psychological theory, put forward by Starbuck (1911) at the turn of the century, which claims that there is a collapse of the will prior to sudden conversion, a sense of personal futility which becomes so great that the person simply gives up. It is at that point, where the will ceases to function, that the conversion experience is thought to occur.

In the eyes of followers a Shaykh travels a particular path and reaches a certain point, a certain level of closeness to God and, as they describe it, he becomes a "friend of God" by submitting life and purposes to God. And through that closeness he is viewed as a bridge for his followers. The true Sufi or shaykh is believed to have the power to "break the habits" of creation if he wants, but he would only do so in exceptional circumstances and as the result of an explicit divine command (Chittick, 1989: 265). So one of the most common indicators of being a shaykh is the ability to perform some miraculous acts (*karaṁa*). The crucial point here is that it is the disciples, rather than the shaykh himself, who generally create this quality for their shaykh and reproduce it in case of any necessity. This is also true of the group of Shaykh Nazim. The members all agree in affirming the belief in the miracles of the Shaykh and in that he has spiritual power. One of the very staunch disciples explains how he feels about the Shaykh's spiritual

power " To speak about the Shaykh is very difficult because you cannot talk about unlimited things by limited words He is unlimited, we are limited We cannot express Whatever you express is not true " Some of the converts involved in the group reported that they were very much influenced by the spirituality of the Shaykh at first sight Norman expressed how he felt when he first met Shaykh Nazim ten years ago

" I was lucky enough to be working at X with a man who I had known for a long time and I had a special feeling about him, but he had taken Islam and he had become a follower of Shaykh Nazim And I had my Zen master and he had his shaykh So I used to talk about my trip to Japan and Zen and he was talking about Shaykh Nazim and Islam And I became interested in what he was saying about the Shaykh and I felt certain things very strongly about him Then what happened was he said, "Why don't you meet Shaykh Nazim?" And I said, "I'd like to", because I was impressed by what he said about him. And it was ironic because I've travelled round the world, I've seen the Philippines, the psychic surgeons, making operations with their hands and living in a Zen monastery in Japan and all these different exotic cultures, but in the end he said, "Come to Peckam Mosque in London and meet Shaykh Nazim " I decided I would go And as I was driving I remember getting very excited with a tremendous feeling of anticipation in a very nice way I had not really felt before, a powerful and a kind of high feeling And I remember going inside the Mosque and Shaykh Nazim wasn't there and there were only a few people, going inside and sitting down and feeling very excited And I remember when he came in at the far end I had a tremendous feeling, my heart was like it was going to explode And when I was introduced to him by an American brother I was very impressed by him and I couldn't take my eyes off him I never had met anyone like him at all "

During the interviews some accounted that the Shaykh made several predictions about the future Some of these, according to them, came about and some did not However, this did not shake their devotion to him George recalled

"I remember him saying many years ago "Don't take any notice of peace talks " At that time there was nothing like this, this was about 6-7 years ago And we asked him, "What peace talks?", and he said, "You will see They will not be as they seem to be "

The "peace talks" was apparently referring to the "Middle-East peace talks" after the Gulf War according to George Several converts unanimously said that the Shaykh a couple of years ago had predicted that "the Berlin Wall will come down and Germany will be united " These predictions are believed by the followers to have come about However, in the eighties Shaykh Nazim has said things like "The Third World War is round the corner, and it will start by Russia, the Great Satan, attacking Turkey and as Turkey is part of NATO it will respond And after that *Mahdi* (the Saviour) and *Dajjal* (the false Messiah or Antichrist) and then Isa (Jesus) will appear successively " One of the books by Shaykh Nazim (1987 140-4), which includes his talks in 1986, confirms the accounts of the informants Seemingly his prediction regarding the Third World War by Russia attacking Turkey has not taken place so far, but his authority remained unquestioned by the followers and their loyalty to him still seems undiminished When asked how

she felt about this Third World War issue after the dissolution of the Soviet Union Rachel said "I understand him, it is a teaching method, it does make you act together and work on yourself if you think time is running out "

Some of the converts interviewed on the contrary, do not pay any attention to the issue of Shaykh Nazim's predictions, miracles, and some sort of rumours going around They purport that it is the people's perception of the Shaykh which causes trouble For them God chooses some people and those people may break the bounds of existence but, they think, it is not so important if it happens To them a shaykh is to teach people how to come closer to God and help people purify themselves They believe that some people tend to interpret things in a way which is to their advantage and these people misunderstand the Shaykh Such a convert is Richard, who is one of the oldest convert in the group

"A lot of things are being said by people who are around him in ignorance A lot of them have no substance It is quite remarkable that one can be present at one of his talks and find that people who have been there also have completely misunderstood what he has said They give a wrong meaning to it, whether converts or otherwise So they are treating him as some cults treat their leaders making them into little gods and they talk about them in various sorts of extravagant ways They can't see their shaykhs as they need to see them A shaykh can reach a high spiritual level and one can see and feel the power when it comes out from the shaykh They have reached a high spiritual level, and to that extent they are holy men as well as being spiritual guides But this is a far cry from the extravagant things that people claim for Shaykh Nazim or shaykhs It is the same phenomenon, I think, that made Jesus Christ into God Shaykh Nazim may say things jokingly, but they take it deadly seriously This is because of the big crowd during *Ramadañ* which contains people from different backgrounds I remember from 1974 onwards there were only a few of us, about half a dozen converts, and we were all aching from laughing so much because he was telling these jokes And he was very humorous just like the Prophet It was very simple, innocent humour, but very funny And he teaches in the same way all the time Now sitting in the mosque during *Ramadañ* and he would be cracking jokes and the people who have been there longest will snigger or giggle, even laugh, but the others if you turn round and look at them, they are deadly serious "

## **6- Psychotherapeutic Treatment**

It is evident that religion has the potential for therapeutic experience and that religious conversion and thereby membership in a group provides the convert with psychological gains in the form of conflict resolution and identity formation (Bragan, 1977 177, Brown, 1987 160) Deutsch (1975 166), for example, studying a group of converts to Hinduism concluded that on involvement with the guru and a new "family" they experienced increased well-being and periods of bliss In this sense, for some people the group of the Shaykh seems to be playing a vital role as the generic therapeutic agent through interpersonal intimacy The potential convert arrives at the group function full of apprehension and doubts about his self-worth and full of hope for relief

Within the group individuals feel secure. There is noticeable solidarity between the members. Through relationship with this newly found group of caring people, unconditional acceptance, and lavish love from them boost the potential's self esteem. His sense of self-worth is heightened by becoming the focus of the group's attention.

The case of Kevin, who has now been involved with Shaykh Nazim's group for 7 years, sets an example on how social identification with a group can help people overcome their depression and make life bearable for them. Kevin was born in a working class home where religion was never discussed. In his twenties Kevin felt that he did not fit into this society and did not accept the usual social values such as working which eventually led him to join, what he calls, an anarchist group where he wanted to get rid of any kind of social conditioning. By doing so he thought he found freedom, peace and happiness and started experimenting with marijuana and LSD. When 26 Kevin became disillusioned with anarchism coming to the conclusion that "it will not go anywhere", and he developed an interest in a sort of Buddhism through the philosophy of a macrobiotic diet which he described as "it was almost making your religion out of diet". He felt that man had become artificial and if he could return to natural living like growing his own food and living on basic things, then the problems of the world would be eradicated.

Having been involved with macrobiotics Kevin had a girl friend who was also involved with macrobiotics. He got her pregnant and she chose to have abortion against Kevin's wishes. Kevin felt that it had destroyed the love between them, and they drifted apart. Then he felt upset and depressed for quite a while drifting aimlessly through life looking for something, not knowing what it was. He was still interested in macrobiotics for a few years, but he did anything he came across and then he became interested in New Age philosophies. As an extension of his involvement with New Age thinking, he went to live in California because he thought "all the cults are here". He also thought that if he went to another country and started again, he could have a better life. There he met a girl and they lived together for two years, and got married. But it did not work out and she took up with another "guy". Losing two girl friends one after another led Kevin to involvement with a Rajneesh group which denounces sex and advises celibacy. Yet Kevin was still not happy. After staying three years in California he felt even more rootless than he did in England. So he decided to come back to London in 1982 when he was 34. "I could never understand what used to bother me. It seemed to me all these other people seemed to be finding things, but I did not. Life generally did not seem to have any kind of purpose."

When he came back he took interest in Buddhist meditation, but still did not depart from New Age. He also started going to church feeling that perhaps the best thing for him to do would



be to go back to his original tradition since he was a Westerner. But he soon felt it was a kind of class activity, "a middle class thing". Kevin now concedes that perhaps he was deluding himself by being an eclectic, but he felt

"To me it did not really seem to matter what people believe as long as it worked. That would have been sufficient. If I had found something that worked even if the beliefs had been absurd, I would have accepted it. I was looking for something that worked, something that gives you integration and strength. That was what I was looking for. Whatever it was I did not care what kind of mad beliefs. But if it worked as far as I was concerned that must be true because it works."

Three years after his return from California he happened to meet a convert follower of Shaykh Nazim who invited him to a Sufi meeting. Kevin was curious and he thought he would go. It was a dhikr ceremony and he felt the atmosphere was very peaceful. He also enjoyed the food served afterwards and thought "It is even worth coming here just for the food" and decided to go along. "It seemed like better than any other thing I was going to because I was always going all the time from one thing to another. I was looking for something I did not know what it was. And then I kept going every Friday night and just started to understand a bit more about it." The same night when he first went to the dhikr meeting Kevin had a dream which tells how strongly he was craving to overcome his problems.

"In the dream I was a Muslim and I went to a house. And there was a room with some people in it. And I felt that I had these problems in this room and I sorted out the problems. I felt or I knew that I was a Muslim and I was the only one who was Muslim in the house. Other people in the room seemed to be in confusion whereas I was not because I was a Muslim. That was the dream, but it was very clear. It was not vague or weird. When I woke up I thought about it and I said, "I don't have any intention of being Muslim. Come on, I am not going to be a Muslim!"

Kevin was also attracted to the friendliness of the people in the group.

"I liked people to talk to. They seemed nice people. The feeling was very good. If I had any questions they were willing to talk to me about things. I just started to get interested in Islam. They were not trying to convert me. They were not saying I should become a Muslim. They just suggested that I meet the Shaykh when he comes."

When the Shaykh came in four months time Kevin accepted him as his master and took the *shahaḍah* then. He found an identity in the group, a sense of belonging and brotherhood. A group of people he can relate to. As his involvement with the group and his relationship with the Shaykh improved Kevin gradually felt that life has become manageable.

By time the converts in question seem to have overcome their problems depending on their assimilation of the group code and standard of behaviour such as no smoking, no alcohol, etc. In this sense, the Shaykh plays the role of a psychotherapist. In fact there are some converts

as well as lifelong Muslims around the Shaykh who may be suffering from psychological disturbances. The Shaykh keeps them close to himself and he has been able to help some of them. One of the informants on the group of Shaykh Nazim is a psychotherapist, who became Muslim through Shaykh Nazim after having been involved with Zen-Buddhism for 10 years. He reported that the Shaykh was able to cure some cases. It was also reported by another convert that a psychotherapist from Germany, who knows Shaykh Nazim, recommends some of his clients to meet Shaykh Nazim.

The present observation is congruous with observations in clinical psychiatry which confirms that many patients with depressive disorders experience relief via a religious experience (Cavenar and Spaulding, 1977: 210). It is observable that those who were emotionally disturbed before their conversions seem more able to accept themselves and show signs of being able to cope more effectively with their own problems and the pressures of living in society although some of their personal problems developed earlier in life still persist with less profound influence. In this sense, the group of Shaykh Nazim serves a therapeutic function for people because it represents mediating structures which offer the opportunity for close face to face relationships with people who share a collective sense of belonging based upon a unifying religious belief. However, Sufis regard their system as being far in advance of modern psychiatrists because it extends beyond the conceptual and technical limits of psychology and embodies a method for assisting man to develop the special perception upon which his welfare, and that of the human race, depends (Deikman, 1979: 195). Furthermore the group offers a holistic self-concept whereby the member can perceive his various activities and experiences as integrated under the auspices of a single ideal or symbol system.

Shaykh Nazim believes that he moves beyond the compass of psychotherapists in that he has a deeper goal than self awareness and development, he has the goal of achieving self awareness and realisation on the basis of Sufic principle that "he who truly knows himself (the self) knows God", for every divine quality is reflected in man. He explains what sort of therapeutic methods he has for depression and behavioural abnormalities. He asserts that superficial conditioning causes behaviour abnormalities and depression, etc., and one's environment can affect one's development, but there is the divinely ordained personality in everyone which is always sound and intact which he calls the "dye of Allah". The essence is ever the same manifestation of Divine Perfection - like indelible ink that can be covered but never removed. Shaykh Nazim believes that the things which cover this essence (coats of cheap paint, as he calls them) may be removed and this is, he says, what he does with his followers. In this sense, he calls

himself as psychiatrist and accuses most psychiatrists of not trying to remove those coats of paint, but only applying a new coat over the old one and making their patients estranged even more from that original Divine coat (Sheikh Nazim, 1986 36-7) His job, as he defines it, "is to remove all the paint and lay bare the original 'dye of Allah' which pertains to the Divine essence, the original spiritual personality But the ego (lower-self) does not want its layers of paint to be removed " Therefore the Shaykh tries to give step by step treatment to new comers, as he addresses them in one of his talks

" If I were to say this is to you at first and immediately set to removing the layers of ego, quickly you would all escape from my hands To move a mountain is an easier task than removing one of the acquired characteristics of our egos The ego puts forward claims to being the rider and not just the horse Our job is to make this all clear and help people get their horses under control As for psychiatrists, most of them add only more to the already heavy burden of their clients They cannot affect the soul with their methods, at best they can train the horse to behave a little more obediently In order to affect the rider of the horse there must be a (master or guide) at work " (Sheikh Nazim, 1986 38-9)

The main causes of depression, the Shaykh believes, is the 'effect of memory' upon people He says "When we recall such painful events, a fire roars out of control through our hearts. Then we arrive at a gaping hole in our hearts Our present life becomes a bridge between the past and the future, between two terrible visions haunting memories and anxiety-filled anticipation of the future Those memories will persist as memories, but faith may effectively neutralise their painful effects He who has been absorbed in the love of God may feel himself to have made a new beginning and to have left painful memories far behind " (Sheikh Nazim, 1986 51) At this point the Shaykh offers "love for God", which is, in fact, what the Sufi way can be described by, in order to have the convert or new comer forget about the events of the past which were painful or traumatic for him Shaykh Nazim also recognises 'hopelessness' as the cause of depression Here, he opens a new world to the hopeless He says "We, as servants of a great God, have no right to be hopeless The Lord may change everything in a second He whose faith is strong will never doubt that his Lord ultimately intends good for him in this life and the next, and he will be patient through adversity, looking for the Lord's promised respite " (Sheikh Nazim, 1986 52-3) His prescription for the 'hopelessness' is the remembrance of one's servanthood to God and thanking Him regularly by saying *al-hamdulillah* (thanks be to God) which, he claims, takes depression away

## **Conclusion**

People who are seeking to fulfil some social or psychological need may feel satisfied with membership in some groups, as they often provide the appearance of emotional stability and

security Accordingly the group of Shaykh Nazim offers one a new social identity and provides the individual with companionship and a sense of belonging that he failed to attain within the larger society. In that society he was not living in intimate relations that firmly bound him with others due to the state of modern urban life which undermined traditional mediating structures between the individual and the larger society, such as the family, the neighbourhood, and personal work setting This process was further accelerated by the past events which many converts involved in this study experienced like family disorders as well as coming from a background where religion had little/no meaning in life at all Of course this does not explain the whole issue of conversion through Sufism There is also the dimension of spiritual seekership in a substantial number of converts' case It seems that they were mostly attracted by the spiritual teaching of the Shaykh and Sufism As the Shaykh himself claims Western people are attracted to his movement because they are in need for peace in themselves just as a hungry person looks for a place selling food "He looks for a restaurant or a Wimpy shop, etc He does not ask if it is a Christian shop, or a Jewish shop, or a Muslim restaurant If he is hungry, he seeks not to die by hunger He looks and takes where he finds " Here, the individual takes spirituality as the new answer and develops the belief that the spiritual realm holds the key to the resolution of his problems and the society's social problems So it is observable that the shift is not only about one's departure from (nominal) Christianity to Islam, but it is also about one's withdrawal from secular to sacred, as the following account from a convert shows

"Our hearts can feel, can recognise the bright light of goodness coming out of our respected and beloved Shaykh Nazim In the midst of growing dark waves of modern way of living he is like a lighthouse showing the way to the only worthwhile place to go to back to our source, back to Allah He is a living example of the highest quality which a human being can reach holiness " (see Sheikh Nazim, 1987 introduction)

In addition to these characteristics, the problem-solving perspective of the group is another stage of the converts' experience This is an important phase of the process since it focuses on the individual's rational evaluation of the group or the teaching of the Shaykh Here, the potential convert assesses the group's orientation to change in terms of his private values, needs, and goals and then makes his choice Once the process is complete he feels that he has been provided with a *weltanschauung*, a world-view, and a perspective on life

On the part of the Shaykh there are two further factors in people's attraction to his movement *Firstly*, Shaykh Nazim prefers not to attack Christianity If he did so, many would not feel at ease with him in the first place A conversation following a question between Shaykh Nazim

and one of his followers elucidates his soft approach towards Christianity. The question was asked in a meeting where a Christian audience was also present. It reads

The follower "Could you tell us, please, Christianity says Jesus was crucified, and in Islam he was not crucified, can you?"

Shaykh Nazim "Are you a Muslim?"

The follower "Yes "

Shaykh Nazim "Keep your belief. They are Christians and they keep their beliefs. No need for discussion. Don't touch the beliefs of people. The important thing is that if your beliefs are taking you to the Lord, it is all right. If your car is running all right, what am I saying? Am I saying, "Come down and come to my car?" No! But if it is broken, I may say, "Oh, welcome! Come to my car. I will give you a lift." It is a point that 1400 years of discussion has never solved. Therefore we do not disturb people through their beliefs and we speak to our distinguished audience as all of us brothers from one common origin. And we do not make a difference, but we only talk on the main subjects for every religion. What was their main purpose? To allow mankind to reach their Lord."<sup>20</sup>

Shaykh Nazim talks to converts in ways that they understand handsomely. He understands English people's inherent mysticism, and that they are staunchly monarchist. He sometimes refers to the Queen as "our Queen", and to Prince Charles as "our future king" on the basis that he comes from Cyprus which in the past was a member of Commonwealth. Moreover, there is a rumour going around in his circle that Prince Charles is a secret Muslim. *Secondly*, the Shaykh does not call for withdrawal from the society or being in conflict with others. He asks his followers to make an impression on others through exemplary tolerance and kindness and not to make conflict with anyone through bad manners. At this point he does not favour disintegration with the wider society and asks his followers to stay in the society discouraging them from establishing entirely separate communities (Sheikh Nazim, 1982-1983: 60).

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted from a talk by Shaykh Nazim given to local teachers at Spurley Hey School, Rotterdam, Sheffield, on 26 May 1988, for written testimony see Sheikh Nazim, 1988-1991: 4.

## D: THE GROUP OF 'ABD AL-QĀDIR AS-SUFI (AL-MURĀBIT)

In Britain a Scottish man, Ian Dallas, a writer and actor, who became Muslim in 1967 and was named 'Abd al-Qādir as-Sufi, started a Sufic/Islamic movement in the early seventies. Since his embracing Islam 'Abd al-Qādir has been working to form a disciplined organisation which seemed to have had success. Having founded his mission in Britain he travelled constantly, and made *da'wah* all over Europe and America, and even beyond. He later branched into South Africa (Hogg, 1990), Nigeria, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Arab world (el-Affendi, 1988: 51).

The information and the data on the group of 'Abd al-Qādir were collected through formal interviews with one present, and five ex-members involved with the group, and observation on the group in the Summer of 1990. The sources on the group also cover materials such as 'Abd al-Qādir's books and tape-cassettes, the group's Journal, *Islam*, which did not last long, and leaflets/booklets by the group. Apart from one, the present members involved with the group refused to give a formal interview on their conversion experience, but they were helpful in providing relevant information on the current mission and activities of the group.

### 1- History and Membership

Ian Dallas was plagued with the same disillusionment that beset the rising generation of the sixties, who lost hope in the western culture. His story with Islam and Sufism began in the mid-sixties when he bought a Persian miniature and discovered an inscription of the name of the renowned Sufi 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 1166) on its back. Then his journey to Muslim countries led him to embrace Islam in Marrakech in 1967 taking the name of 'Abd al-Qādir when he was initiated by a Sufi shaykh. In 1968 his quest led him to Shaykh ibn Ḥabīb al-Darqāwī in Meknes, Morocco, who appointed 'Abd al-Qādir as a *muqaddam* (representative or section head) of the *Darqāwīyyah Tanīqah*, a branch of *Shādhiliyyah*, giving him the name of as-Sufi and ordered him to go and call people to Islam (Clarke, 1983: 13).

'Abd al-Qādir gained success soon and a community of British and American Muslims formed around him. In 1975-76 they squatted in a derelict row of houses in Bristol Gardens, West London, and formed a small community there. They were around 20-30 people, mostly singles with a few couples or families. They were mostly people who had taken drugs before. The whole street was taken over by tens of people in green turbans and Moroccan robes. The life they lived was romantic and answered the needs of the disillusioned youth fleeing the West's materialistic

culture <sup>21</sup> In fact, he used to accept in his circle groups of "seekers" from all walks of life, without making accepting Islam a condition. Only later would he tell them that there can be no way forward without Islam. As interviewees who were involved in his early group recount, Sufism appealed to them in the first place and they were driven into Islam by the uneasiness they felt in their culture, not because Islam was "true" or the "best" religion. "It was actually a sort of Islamised version of new left politics and philosophy. And it had much more to do with students' revolution in Paris and stuff like that", said an early participant. William described how he felt before he met this group of people:

"In 1974 I met some English-American Muslims living like a community in London. They were following the Sufi path. Leading up to that stage I was sometimes looking for something, sometimes just enjoying myself as well as working. I was playing Rock and Roll, smoking things, sometimes I was trying to be serious about life. I thought the society I grew up in was too materialistic and I was. And the way I experienced it after meeting with these new Muslims there was not any other way to go. It was the way suddenly I experienced. So I just had to take the step and I had to put my trust in it. Then within two-three months I became Muslim when I was 26."

The friendly atmosphere of the group attracted many people like Henry. Henry had come from countryside to London and had been feeling lonely when he happened to meet them.

"Initially when I went to their meeting what attracted me most was people were so welcoming. Undoubtedly, that was one of the strongest things in my conversion because as one who has been used to a quite warm environment in my home I found London very very different and from that point of view one of the big things was just a good company of the people who were morally much more interesting than most of the people I had been dealing with. I think it was probably 4-5 months since I started going to their meetings and at the end of which time I said to myself, "there isn't really anyway. I am going to understand any more of what people are really talking about unless I practise it with them." And at that time I didn't have any conception of what I was taking on. And I said, "Can I become Muslim?" and they said, "Yes, of course." That was in 1972."

Then 'Abd al-Qādir began to act like a shaykh. Discipline was strict with requirements of full obedience to him. There was also a requirement of shunning all aspects of modern culture and civilisation. No western dress was allowed and for several months in the mid-seventies, they were forbidden to use electricity and given the alternative of wood fires and oil lamps. By doing so the whole rejectionist stance towards western culture was becoming fulfilled. Moreover, in later years he banned his followers from sending their children to school, for he believed education to be the main instrument of indoctrination and assimilation into *kaṭīr* (infidel) society.

With the death of 'Abd al-Qādir's master Shaykh al-Habīb in 1971 'Abd al-Qādir had the chance of supplying all guidance himself. Nevertheless, for several years he called himself a

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<sup>21</sup> The interviews with people involved with this movement confirm the fact that they were disillusioned with materialistic culture.

*muqaddam*, not a Shaykh. His books were published under the name of 'Abd al-Qādir as-Sufi. To some he added the title *ad-Darqāwī*, the *tarīqah* of his shaykh al-Habīb. In the mid-seventies he began to search for a new shaykh. In 1976, he said "We found none to whom we could entrust our noble followers." In late 1976 he travelled to Libya to see Shaykh Muhammad al-Faytūnī from the *Alawīyyah Tarīqah*, who allegedly declared him the shaykh of both *Alawīyya* and *Darqāwīyyah*, which were supposed to be unified under him. The book entitled "The Darqāwī Way" (1979: 322) published by Diwan Press, the publishing arm of the movement, includes 'Abd al-Qādir's name as the unifying shaykh of the *Darqāwīyyah* and *Alawīyya*, as successor of the Moroccan shaykh Ibn al-Habīb and Libyan shaykh al-Faytūnī.

His community was growing, and his fame was spreading throughout the Muslim world and his writings were being translated into the different languages Muslims speak. And by the late 1970s his thinking had changed to activism. In the summer of 1976, the group started to hold mid-day prayers in Hyde Park on weekends, with the aim of drawing people's attention to Islam. At the end of 1976 'Abd al-Qādir wanted his followers to move into the countryside, Norfolk, to set up a self-sufficient Muslim village<sup>22</sup> of believers "to create a complete social nexus in which Islam can flourish on the grounds that the environment of the existing society was inimical to the survival of the true Islam, and that Islam cannot be reduced to an hour's religious education for children." The aim of such a community would be to demonstrate the "noble morality of Islam" both to the English people disenchanted with materialism and to Muslims in Britain who are now anxious to recover the full Islam they lost when they left their countries.<sup>23</sup> However, since adequate funding was not forthcoming from the Muslim world for this self-sufficient village project, they bought Wood Daling Hall, an old mansion just outside Norwich, which they renovated and made their home and centre. It was called the *Darqāwī Institute* and from there they published a journal called *Islam* of which the first issue came out in June 1976.

With the establishment of this *Darqāwī Institute* tensions began to occur. As the group expanded and included men with families and children, which reached to a peak of around 200 families, their needs grew, and this unplanned life was no longer adequate. There was also some burgeoning dissatisfaction with 'Abd al-Qādir's domineering style (el-Affendi, 1988: 54). He had asked people to leave their businesses and go away on some errand. In practice this was inapplicable to many members' circumstances. Alan recollected how he felt then:

"I've seen he said things which are not right. For instance one time he told us all that we must all sell our cars and we must rent a *chenckie*, which is one of these big American cars and we must

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<sup>22</sup> *Islam Journal of the Darqawī Institute*, 1977, pp. 26-31.

<sup>23</sup> *Islam Journal Of the Darqawī Institute*, June 1976, 1.



all share it. When he said that I knew that there was no way I was gonna get rid of my car. Why should I? I'm a builder, I need a car, I have a big family. So if I listened to what he says I would have been doing myself such a grave disservice. This is just one example out of many. A few around him did sell their cars, but none of the rest of us did. He just said he didn't like cars, but he was always wanting lifts here and there."

Moreover, 'Abd al-Qādir, with the help of donations from all over the Muslim world, lived and travelled comfortably (el-Affendi, 1988: 54). This led to bitter criticism and later 'Abd al-Qādir decided that most people should leave Wood Daling Hall and fend for themselves. So the theory and the practice were in contrast. A community which was supposed to be founded on solidarity and absence of anxiety over worldly matters found itself in turmoil and intense anxiety about where tomorrow's meal was going to come from. One of the subjects, who lived in Norwich at the time and was slightly involved with the group recollected how the community was then known in Norwich by the surrounding society:

"It was hopeless. It never really even worked. It was absolutely awful, it was a big huge building that was really falling down. They kept the women in a terrible state, they hardly ate anything, they just left them to themselves. They were trying to live in the country, but they had no idea. The whole place was completely mad. 'Abd al-Qādir's ideas do not hold water. You can't just sort of move into a great big huge house in the country. They became a joke in the vicinity."

These contradictions finally led to a crisis in the community. It was apparently caused by the idea of avoiding the society in the first place. As an ex-devotee of 'Abd al-Qādir conceded, "they were here to transform their lives within the society, but they did not even relate to the actual Muslim community, let alone British society in general." The crisis was delayed by progressive concessions that were made to the harsh realities of life. First, he relaxed his ban on electricity and the use of other modern technological products. Then it was decided that the Moroccan dress was too much of a hindrance in delivering the message to the local people. So the robe was dropped, but the green turban was kept (The turban too was dropped in turn later. They now wear the robe and the turban only when they do dhikr). And finally, the ban on sending children to school was lifted. Though the bans were dropped in practice some of them are still held in theory even now and seem to have impressed some members of the movement extremely. To cite an example, I remember how one of the members refused to have his picture taken on the basis that the camera is a technological product which does not reflect the genuine nature of man.

Then the group split into factions and the whole affair of setting up a community disintegrated. After these problems in Norwich, 'Abd al-Qādir emigrated to Spain. A small community affiliated to him has been formed there since the mid-seventies, centred in Granada (el-Affendi, 1988: 56). He is now based in Spain and still has close contact with those remaining

members of his community in Britain. He occasionally comes to Britain to deliver conferences. Such a conference entitled "Islam Against the New World Order" was given by him in March 1991, in the aftermath of the Gulf War in Regents College, London. He appointed a new *amiṛ* for Britain and paying allegiance to the appointed *amiṛ* is a prerequisite to being a member. The group still seems to be active. They organise lectures, conferences, Sufic days and dhikr ceremonies for non-Muslims, and more significantly they are still able to draw some converts into Islam.

Now there are around 15 families and 10 single followers of the Shaykh in Norwich, who are all active in making *da'wah*, in addition to those living in other parts of Britain. According to the ex-members interviewed the people who left 'Abd al-Qādir still remain Muslim and they scattered around the country where they found job opportunities, such as London where many returned. Only one or two people left Islam when they left him. These people, who left 'Abd al-Qādir, but remained Muslim, do not see their involvement with him regrettable. On the contrary, they are grateful to him for that he introduced them to Islam, but also state that they drifted away from him since his views have gone extreme and his authoritarian personality invoked many problems as Bernard reported: "We didn't get on well because I felt he was sort of a manipulative man."

## 2- The Two Phases of the Movement

The development of 'Abd al-Qādir's movement presents two significant periods. First he was a Sufi and his call was primarily based on Sufism. Islam was playing a secondary role. As the early group members reported, association was not being made with Islam directly. Esoteric teaching of Sufism was the primary appealing element in drawing people to the group. In the latter period, Islam, combined with Sufism, emphasising the outward form of religion (*sharī'ah*) became the cardinal objective of the movement. In both periods the existing society in Britain or western society was not acceptable. However, in the former period 'Abd al-Qādir took a rejectionist stance favouring isolation from the environment. In the latter, he preferred to work within the society. Propagating Islam as a solution to the problems of "diseased" western culture and using the channel of social networks became the method of the group. Dropping the Moroccan robe and the turban, and putting the problems facing British people in their daily life today, such as usury, unemployment and family breakdown on their agenda were the signs of this alteration. In the former period 'Abd al-Qādir took the name of as-Sufi whereas he later called himself *al-Muraḥīṭ* and the movement, *The Muraḥīṭūn European Muslim Movement*, to signify this new orientation. Bit by bit 'Abd al-Qādir distanced himself from traditional Sufi quietism and became more outspoken and he took the model of *Medina* to mean the following of *Maḥikī* school (as-Sufi, 1981: 55). He

proposed revitalising Sufism, and restoring the *sharīʿah* according to the *Maḥiki* school. He came to the conclusion that *Sufism* and *sharīʿah* should go hand in hand.

Taking the new name of *al-Muraḥīṭ* is significant in the sense that it refers to a movement started in 1029 by a Moroccan Muslim scholar, ‘Abd allāh ibn Yāsīn whose followers rapidly grew in spiritual stature and in numbers and the movement began the first flowering of Islam in Spain (Thomson, 1989). Thus it will be useful to analyse the term to realise the nature of the current nature of ‘Abd al-Qādir’s movement. The term *muraḥīṭ* (literally “the tied one”) is an Arabic term which in North Africa signified pious Muslims who established themselves in tribal territories when the region was not yet thoroughly Islamised. They constituted the “tie” between Islam and the tribes surrounding them. The term is now used as “marabout” and has accumulated a baggage of misinterpretation over the years, although it is derived from *muraḥīṭ*, which means “the pious one” (Eickelman, 1981: 289). *Ribaṭ* means a fort on the frontier of Islam. The performance of garrison duty at the frontiers of *dar al-Islām* (“the abode of faith”) was viewed as a pious duty from the time of ‘Umar (d. 644). Those who performed this duty of vigilance and defence in later Islam were called *al-Muraḥīṭūn* (the “ones bound to religious duty”). This became the name of the movement of the al-Moravid - the Spanish name of the dynasty derived from the term *muraḥīṭ*. The institution of the *ribaṭ* mingled military service with religious observance and some forts (*ribaṭ*s) became in time the meeting places of Sufis, and *muraḥīṭ*s had the reputation for engaging in constant dhikr in addition to five daily prayers when they were not fighting jihad either in Morocco or Spain (see Thomson, 1989). In the *ribaṭ* model the following five principles should be activated: (a) A group of Muslims must enclose themselves in the *ribaṭ* or intensive training, (b) they must study and recite the Book of Allah until they are used to handling it. They must be able to recognise the pure *huda* (guidance) and not to follow *kaṭīr* models, (c) they must practise dhikr of Allah and watch the night in *muraqabah* (vigilance). Intensity of dhikr is a prerequisite for battle, (d) they must be trained in combat, (e) when the training in these elements is complete, the individual then goes into solitary retreat. During this time if Allah wills, his inner eye is opened and he is freed from fear of creation and lack of provision. With this five-part scheme complete the men of *ribaṭ*, *muraḥīṭūn*, are forged. They will be the men ready to fight the infidel society for they will not merely oppose *kufr* (the state of being infidel) - they will be inwardly and outwardly equipped to establish an Islamic society according to the *Medina* pattern (as-Sufi, 1978: 40).

So in the later years of his mission ‘Abd al-Qādir decided that the time has come to apply the *ribaṭ* model. He felt they should equip themselves to act on their beliefs. He studied Islam to show people that Islam is a political reality as well as doing dhikr or engaging in worship (as-Sufi, 1978: 37). Now he defines his group *Muraḥīṭūn* as Muslims who manned outposts, training,

studying and then went out to carry the message of Islam forward. In its present form the movement seems to be determined to confront the many and urgent economic, ecological and social problems facing the world today and to find solutions for them. Therefore the nature of 'Abd al-Qādir's movement now very much differs from those classical Sufi definitions since it is concerned with this worldliness rather than otherworldliness. In an attempt to put their message across the *Murabitūn* members in Norwich set up an organisation called P A I D People Against Interest Debt.<sup>24</sup> The aim of the organisation is said to let people know that the interest economy is "a new form of slavery." The common factor to current problems facing people in Britain such as inflation, unemployment, mortgage repossession, debt, and family breakdown is usury.<sup>25</sup> The issues they discuss are not confined to politics or economics, but covers social issues such as Aids, intoxication, drug-use, and the rise of crime.

### 3- Islam: A European Phenomenon

One of the most distinguishing features of 'Abd al-Qādir's mission is that it is a movement which predominantly consists of converts. It was started, led and developed by them, having only a few lifelong Muslims involved. It has been founded in Britain and now it is based in Spain drawing Spanish converts into Islam. 'Abd al-Qādir's departure from Britain to Spain was not a coincidence. 'Abd al-Qādir claims that Islam was/is not an oriental phenomenon, but it had in fact become a European phenomenon in Spain. According to him the closest model of the *Medina* model of the Prophet was right there in Granada and Cordoba. That is why he has a vision for Europe called "from Islam to Islam" with the objective of marrying the culture of Islam with western culture. He believes that Islam lies at the core of western thought. For example, the writings of a Spanish Muslim philosopher Ibn Rusd were translated into Latin and Hebrew and these Latin translations of Ibn Rusd, he claims, became the foundation of Western thought or what is now called "Western civilisation."<sup>26</sup> 'Abd al-Qādir makes it clear that they stand for the Islamisation of the West, that is to bring Islam into the West, "not to make everybody a Pakistani or an Egyptian, but to allow the natural genius of the people to express itself."

Due to these ideas of 'Abd al-Qādir the movement can be labelled as "European" in terms of geographical origin and centre. In spite of his rejection of western culture, 'Abd al-Qādir has always wanted to promote an Islam which will attract western people. And one can easily notice the sense of Europeanism within the group. They are not enthusiastic to mingle or associate with

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<sup>24</sup> P A I D, People Against Interest Debt, A Murabitun Organisation, P O Box 436, Norwich NR3, Leaflet entitled "The Interest Economy A New Form of Slavery", nd

<sup>25</sup> Leaflet by P A I D titled "What is the Common Factor", nd

<sup>26</sup> Tape-cassettes of A as-Sufi which contain his talks over the years. See also as-Sufi, 1978 46

lifelong Muslims from the subcontinent or Arab world since they believe that it is good for non-Muslims not to associate Islam with Arabs or Pakistanis. When this association is made, they say, non-Muslims will think of Islam as a cultural thing, the religion of Arabs or whatever. In the West, in their view, the true nature of Islam is obscured by its false identification with the life-style of Arab and Asian nations, and their modern state-controlled religion.<sup>27</sup> A typical illustration of this disposition is that if they convene a meeting specifically for non-Muslims, they do not want lifelong Muslims to attend those meetings. This stance towards lifelong Muslims from the subcontinent or the Arab world has always been felt by some Muslims in touch with the group, and even by some converts interviewed. It was labelled as "racial superiority" by Alan who made a bitter criticism. "I have seen a very distinct racial superiority that comes over. I really don't know why. They seem to reject all the traditional things of Islam." 'Abd al-Qādir primarily seeks conversion of British or Europeans to Islam. In his talk in Regent's College, London, in March 1991 he explicitly expressed "Our job is to make this country Muslim. Our religion orders us to go out and give people good news."

Having analysed the development of the *Murabitūn* movement we may now move on to explore 'Abd al-Qādir's teaching and his criticism of western civilisation since disillusionment with it is usually a prerequisite in most conversion cases to Islam through his movement.

#### 4- Teachings

'Abd al-Qādir's current teaching is based on the dichotomy of *haqīqah* and *sharī'ah*. A man of *haqīqah* defends Islam as a spiritual reality having inner meaning and permitting inner knowledge in the heart about the Divine Creator, while a man of *sharī'ah* fulfils the parameters of a social nexus that is permitted within a Muslim community in accordance with the divinely ordained teaching of the revelation of the Qur'ān (as-Sufi, 1978: 9). In this sense the Sufi type that 'Abd al-Qādir tries to form is the one who has an ideology of a very pure form of Islam which exists in a man of both *haqīqah* and *sharī'ah*. A man who has goals of the traditional *jihād* and fights against wrong actions to build a world which is purified by faith (as-Sufi, 1979b: 42-3). Having defined Sufism as "the journey of the slave to the King" he asserts that Sufism and Islam are inseparable. The whole Islam makes someone a Sufi, he says. Equally, one cannot have any sort of inward spirituality unless one is utterly involved in politics. The inward and the outward are inseparable and the outward is political as well. So 'Abd al-Qādir names it "psycho-politics".<sup>28</sup> It means one cannot change the society unless he changes the self. Sufism, as he understands, is not turning

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<sup>27</sup> Leaflet by the Murabitun, nd.

<sup>28</sup> A as-Sufi made this point when he appeared on Channel 4, 18 December 1990, in a programme titled "Sufism: the Heart of Islam."

away from the world. The *ṭarīqahs* are not a "passive force" which are detached from the world, but are dynamic and aggressive (as-Sufi, 1979b: 40). He believes that, by its nature, the *sharī'ah* cannot be divided so that some is accepted and the rest rejected, and that in Muslim lands the whole "political zone" of *sharī'ah* has been abolished (as-Sufi, 1978: 12). The teaching of 'Abd al-Qādir regarding the Muslim World illustrates why his movement turned out to be a European Muslim movement. He refuses to take a Muslim or Islamic model from the Muslim world, but the *Medina* model established in the early years of Islam, claiming that it was later on developed in Spain under the Muslim rule.

As for his analysis related to western culture, he traces the origin of modern western culture to the Jacobins, and sees its essence as "structuralism", the "anti-biological", therefore, "anti-human" tendency towards "mathematising, rigidifying," and "structuralising" man as a "social-biological reality." In his writings and talks he endeavours to elucidate that western civilisation has no future. He shows that in the early 20th century the theory of structuralism reached its fullness. "Marx became foremost spokesman of its economic theory. Freud became the pivotal figure of a movement to structure the nature of the self, psychiatry. Levi-Strauss provided the deep in-back theory both to situate the past and indicate the future of man with his structuralist anthropology." All these theories, 'Abd al-Qādir puts, imprison man in the social structure, the structure of self, language, and human exchanges (as-Sufi, 1976: 4, 1978: 7). Therefore sciences like sociology, psychology and anthropology, he says, are the enemies of Islam in their current forms. In fact, having given the description of Islamic psychology he identifies psychology with Sufism (as-Sufi, 1979b: 46). He believes that the collapse of civilised existence and the present polarity of state tyranny and personal psychosis have placed the human condition in jeopardy (as-Sufi, 1982: 1). "There has never been a more vulnerable community than the current civilisation." (as-Sufi, 1982: 12). "It is a goalless society without direction, like a mouse which chases its own tail in terror, turning on itself." (as-Sufi, 1978: 18). Modern man in the West, he declares, is now in agony which is the consequence of the development of industrial society.

"Schizophrenia - split identity - was the insanity of the industrial culture. Autism is the insanity of the current society - that is, the human creature has been reduced to an automaton, to a totally conditioned machine. The autistic child echoes back to parents their heartless abdication of their own humanity, the numbness of their feelings and the deadness of their own inwardness." (as-Sufi, 1979a: 22-3)

'Abd al-Qādir also criticises the current western society because it lets religious and moral values diminish. The present society, he believes, is "an openly religious society whose worship is

idolatry The idol of today is the labour process, and the sacrament of the idolaters is the consumer product " He writes

"Within fifty years all sexual taboos and moral limits have been destroyed Adultery was declared not only a norm but a sign of upward social mobility Pre-marital sex was declared a sign of political tolerance, opposition to it a sign of incipient fascism Women were defined as being like Negroes or Jews and had to be liberated Everybody was free to be different the populace had been reduced to slavish obedience Controlled by an anti-education of laissez-faire tactics in childhood, in dialogued and monitored sexual expression in adolescence, in forced isolation in the work nexus, lonely in youth, lonely as a nuclear family, lonely in old age - the free urban animal was the most abject and culturally barren human being in the history of the world " (as-Sufi, 1982 57-8)

The dialectic of 'Abd al-Qādir with regard to politics is based on terms such as usury, power system and debt. 'Abd al-Qādir believes that usury is at the root of the injustices of our time, and that until it is confronted and eliminated, other issues cannot be adequately dealt with "They are branches, usury is the root The corruption of business, the poverty, the starvation in Africa is the direct result of the usury system "29 In one of his latest books, *For the Coming Man*, he writes "Debt is the mechanism of the enslavement of men, and an inhibiting factor in the creation of the free man Usury is the instrument of the perpetuation of debt by a mathematical model which will assure its unpayability in the spiral of interest which makes liberation from the debt an impossibility " (as-Sufi, 1988 34) So the first act of a Sufi, he says, is this consciousness that usury must be abolished, "this is the spiritual awareness" That is why he views politics necessary "We have no escape from the political to be spiritually developed " He asserts that power has passed from nations to international monetary and banking system since the Second World War 30 He always urges his followers to put this message against usury across in their relationship with non-Muslims "Thousands of people are losing their houses Tell them they are the victims of this system because they don't know the wisdom of Islam We must call English people to Islam We must infiltrate non-believers by marriage, by business to lift them up from slavery "31

## Conclusion

The *Muraḥitūn* movement with its past and present has a wide reputation among Muslims throughout the world as well as that of Britain The movement also seems to have been one of the most successful groups in attracting non-Muslims to Islam in Britain 'Abd al-Qādir's movement in the seventies has emerged as the first big Sufic movement in the West which is led by a western convert to Islam and is predominantly made up of Westerners It has then appealed to the people

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29 Tape-cassettes of A as-Sufi

30 Tape-cassettes of A as-Sufi

31 Talk given by A as-Sufi in Regent's College, London, 10 March 1991

of the sixties who were depressed and disillusioned with their life-style for one reason or another, which led them to the rejection of western culture in its totality. Yet the authoritarian character and some ideas of 'Abd al-Qādir, such as moving into the countryside, eventually brought a split in the community and the majority of the people pulled out. So the number of members, which was described as hundreds before, came down to tens which eventually led 'Abd al-Qādir to emigrate to Spain and continue his mission there.

It is evident that in the first phase of his mission, 'Abd al-Qādir had rejectionist ideas which suggested isolation from the greater society and that induced the dissolution of the community. As it has become clear in the last two sections on the group of Shaykh Nazim and 'Abd al-Qādir, it is at this point that the two leaders' teachings diverge from each other, though they both started a Sufi/Islamic movement in Britain. The former has never suggested isolation while the latter did so. Nonetheless, in the second period of his mission 'Abd al-Qādir changed his policy so far as the greater society is concerned. It is now him who asks his followers to seek the ways of infiltration into the society to call people to Islam.

Sufism understood by 'Abd al-Qādir is distinctive from other Sufi movements as well as from that of Shaykh Nazim. 'Abd al-Qādir believes that the political dimension of Islam must be made available to Westerners and it must be explained to them "why this society is getting corrupted" whereas Shaykh Nazim avoids this point in general. While 'Abd al-Qādir primarily targets man's intellect Shaykh Nazim is concerned with the "heart", the "soul", and the "self".

Finally, one of the significant features of the *Muraḥitūn* is that their call to Sufism/Islam is an indirect one. They ask the people they target to question their culture and think about the problems facing them in this society. It is here again the two movements differ. While one, Shaykh Nazim's movement, makes available what it has in hand to offer people and focuses on it at the first stage of the mission, the other, 'Abd al-Qādir's mission, asks people to question and become fully aware of what is missing or wrong with what they currently have so that they can fully understand the problems of the whole world and fight to alter the existing system or civilisation.



## **E: FINDINGS ON SUFI NON-SUFI DIFFERENCES REGARDING THEIR BACKGROUNDS AND CONVERSION EXPERIENCES**

The data with regard to converts' background suggests that Sufi and non-Sufi subjects differ in areas like religiosity and involvement in NRMs. Now these areas will be examined.

### **1- Religiosity**

Sufis seem to have lost their belief or interest in the religion in which they were raised and some had been searching for something they could hold on to. Of the 23 Sufi converts (19 Church of England, 2 Catholic, 2 Jewish background), none of them were practising the religion of origin prior to conversion, whereas 8 (17%) non-Sufis were practising their religion. Yet the data analysis does not suggest a significant correlation between being Sufi/non-Sufi and practising religion of origin prior to conversion.

### **2- Conversion Motifs**

Giving credit to the sharing a cognitive system in the Sufi group and the teaching of Sufism a more observable motivating factor (affection) in the conversion experience of the Sufis was found. The way the Sufi group is formed, the warm and spiritual atmosphere, and the sense of brotherhood, has the primary role in their conversion. Many Sufis talked of the psychological and emotional relief and comfort which they experienced when they found such an atmosphere in which they felt at home. Therefore affectional rather than intellectual motifs for Sufis seem to be in operation in the process. 87 percent of the Sufis as against 55 percent of the non-Sufis reported affectional motifs (see table 6.1). The data analysis found the relation between Sufi and affectional motif to be significant ( $\chi^2$  with continuity correction = 5.52, df=1,  $p < .02$ ). The relation between Sufi and intellectual motif was found to be insignificant.

Table 6.1 Conversion motifs: Sufis versus non-Sufis

<b>Motifs</b>	<b>Sufi=23</b>	<b>non-Sufi=47</b>	<b>total=70</b>
Intellectual	16 (70%)	34 (72%)	50 (71%)
Mystical	8 (35%)	2 (4.2%)	10 (14%)
Experiential	14 (61%)	28 (60%)	42 (60%)
Affectional	20 (87%)	26 (55%)	46 (66%)
Coercive	2 (8.7%)	1 (2.1%)	3 (4.3%)

As discussed earlier, before conversion Sufis were disillusioned with the society rather than their religion. They rejected religion not on the basis that it was wrong or irrational, etc., but it was the religion of the society. That is why most Sufi converts were involved in NRMs before their conversion. So these elements in Sufi conversion lead us to the conclusion that in most cases people were driven to Islam through Sufism without having a total religious conviction of Islam at the very outset. That is to say they were not fully aware of what Islam was really about. They knew a little about Islam such as alcohol, drugs and eating pork being prohibited. Their conviction that Islam is a true religion and they should take Islam up as well as Sufism came later on. Consider the case of Peter who is now 35 and has been Muslim for five years

"I've never had any strong connection with Christianity at all. Religion in my life before Islam has played very little part at all. Looking back to my conversion now I can say that I was looking for something. Therefore Islam came along and fulfilled the gap. I don't know, but I often wonder if something else had come along, whether I would have taken up with that. May be it's just chance that it was Islam that came along."

As seen in table 6.1 Sufis seem to be more likely to be mystically oriented. 8 (35%) Sufis as against 2 (4%) non-Sufis underwent mystical motifs in the process. The data analysis found the relationship between Sufi and mystical motif to be significant ( $\chi^2$  with continuity correction = 9.392, df=1,  $p < .01$ ). Since Sufis also have a higher record of reported drug-use before their conversion, this may prove the influence of psychedelic drugs in having a mystical experience. Deutsch (1975: 171) found that virtually all of his 14 subjects who converted to Hinduism had made at least moderate use of LSD and other hallucinogens. His subjects believed that drug-use had influenced their conversion and typically had a "mystical" content such as experiences of unity with others or the cosmos, and revelations of the universal."

### **3- Conviction or Commitment**

This study lends some support to the view that "an individual may enlist in a movement without espousing the goals of the movement and without viewing the world from the perspective that movement is attempting to popularise" (Greil, 1977: 116). Observations on new religious cults on the part of the new recruit have revealed that "when people join a religious cult they first change their behaviour by adopting a new role. The changes may be sweeping and dramatic, but they are not necessarily supported by conviction. The boundless faith of the true believer usually develops only after lengthy involvement" (Balch, 1980: 143, Lofland and Stark, 1965). Cox (1979: 17) studying Eastern Religious movements in America wrote "People who claimed to be immersed in Hindu practices often seemed amazingly unfamiliar with the Hindu scriptures. Enthusiastic Zen disciples sometimes seemed to know very little about Buddhist philosophy."

The conversion experience of Robert, who has been a Sufi Muslim for 18 months now, supports the proposition that conviction does not necessarily exist when the convert takes a verbal proclamation. Robert was feeling incomplete and alienated when he first heard about Sufism. His friend who he went to school with became Muslim through Shaykh Nazim and he kept talking about the Shaykh. Robert read some books by the Shaykh and developed an interest and wanted to see the Shaykh. When the Shaykh came to London in he decided to attend his circle in Peckam Mosque. Robert's interest was not more than this until the following year when the Shaykh came to London again. Throughout the year Robert was still feeling "incomplete" and "alienated". He went to Peckam Mosque again and attended a few talks by the Shaykh. He then met the Shaykh personally and they had a usual conversation for a while. Robert liked the Shaykh and described him as having had a "genuine sincerity" he has not seen in any other religious teacher before. He was also impressed by the whole atmosphere in the group and he decided that he would keep going. Day by day Robert's interest and involvement gradually increased.

" Then what happened was a brother from Holland had a dream before he came over to England that he would be introducing someone to Islam and he told it to the Shaykh and the Shaykh said, "Oh, wait and see!" So this brother said to me, "Do you believe in Muhammad?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "I will take you to the Shaykh." And he asked me to come. And when we went to the Shaykh he said, "This man wants to take the *shahādah*." I didn't know what to say. The Shaykh said to the people there, "Help him!" And they were saying it for me and then it was all over. He gave me an Islamic name. And then the Shaykh looked at me and there was something in him pulling me like a magnet and he was smiling because I think he understood that I wasn't sure what was happening. And my friend who became Muslim earlier came along and said, "This is okay to do this." And the Shaykh said, "Yes, yes, no problem!" So I was doing it without intending to become a Muslim. It was strange, my mind wasn't there saying that I'm gonna take the *shahādah*. It just happened. I mean somebody decided for me on a higher level, spiritual level and I had to go along with it, I couldn't back off. I didn't say "I'm not ready." I said, "This is good, I'll go with it."

As Robert's story suggests some people seem to have joined Sufis without full conviction in the first place though many have joined after months of studying or trying it out. And many reported that they had been influenced by a combination of both the beliefs and the persuasiveness of the atmosphere in the group. Nevertheless, Sufis are more likely to fall into the first category - joining without full conviction - than non-Sufis. This finding additionally clarifies that the need Sufis felt to find out more about what they would be taking up was not so strong as the need to commit themselves to something.

As the Sufi subject, Peter, wonders the point in question here is whether they would have taken up with something else if it had come along. Needless to say, it is extremely difficult to know with certainty, but the closest answer for those who did not try one of the NRMs would be "probably they would", as they were seeking something. As for those who were involved in NRMs before, they would probably move from one to another to make, what Richardson (1978) calls, a

"conversion career" until they fully commit themselves to one, as several investigators of NRMs have presented evidence that it is not uncommon for voluntary defectors later to become members of other religions (Jacobs, 1987, Rochford, 1989 175)

#### **4- Involvement In NRMs**

Though Sufi converts do not significantly differ from non-Sufis with regard to religion of origin they have a higher record of trying NRMs than non-Sufis. Of the 23, 13 (56%) reported previous involvement with one or two of the new religions (10 involved with one, 3 involved with two), while only 7 (15%) of the 47 non-Sufis reported involvement (5 involved with one, 2 involved with two). The data analysis suggests that previous involvement with NRMs is strongly associated with Sufism ( $\chi^2$  with continuity correction = 11.15,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ). All new religions tried by the subjects, be it Sufis or non-Sufis, were Eastern religions (see table 4.3). Their involvement or commitment to these movements did not seem to have been very strong and did not last a long period of time. Only two reported a long period of membership. Jackie was one of them. "I was involved in the Hare Krishna movement for a few months. That was very interesting up to a point, but I left when I discovered that they were very much against women." Jane was involved with Buddhist monks for some time.

"I stayed with Buddhist monks for some time, but I realised I could never be a Buddhist in the same way because I didn't like the images. I always felt uncomfortable bowing down to their images and to believe that the food they offer the Buddha is better than the food they eat otherwise. I just never could whole-heartedly follow that though I felt I had a lot in common with them and I learned a lot from them in devotion and purity. But it was just a theory in people's head. When it comes to the way of life it is different."

#### **5- Experiencing a Traumatic Event**

The high ratio of traumatic event/s experienced by Sufis (78%) in life before conversion in comparison to non-Sufis (53%) also corroborates that they were searching for a group or people they could relate to. Eighteen (78%) of the 23 Sufis reported experiencing a traumatic event in life. Five had their parents divorced when they were a child or adolescent. Five got divorced before they came across Sufism. Two had broken relationship with their girlfriends. Two had accidents in which they nearly got killed. Two lost their fathers when they were young. One lost his closest friend in an accident, and one ended up in hospital due to taking a high-level of drugs. Divorce, either that of parents or converts themselves, was the major traumatic event. This may be an explanation as to why they were particularly affected by the warmth in the Sufi group which they could not find in their home, and as a result they may not have had much hesitation to jump into

this newly found "safe haven" The data analysis found the relation between Sufi and experiencing a traumatic event to be significant (Total  $\chi^2 = 4.09$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .05$ )

## **6- Drug-use**

Sufis are more likely to have been drug-users than non-Sufis. The data analysis suggests that there is an association between Sufi and previous drug-use ( $\chi^2$  with continuity correction = 8.65,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Of the 23 Sufis 15 (65%) reported use of drugs such as marijuana and hallucinogens like LSD when they were younger, while only 3 (13%) reported that they were taking drugs prior to conversion. Of the 47 non-Sufis only 12 (25%) reported previous drug use. Of the 12 only 3 (6%) were using drug prior to conversion. The use of drugs by converts not prior to conversion, but at a younger age may well be explained by two facts. *First*, many have come to Sufism/Islam after trying one of the NRMs in which they were helped to recover from it. And also being involved in NRMs naturally led to conversion at an older age when one gets fed up with bad habits like drugs and attempts to give up.<sup>32</sup> *Second*, many of them were youngsters in the early seventies when using drugs was normative in some young highly-educated groups. As for alcohol use, 12 Sufis (52%) reported previous excessive alcohol use against 7 (15%) non-Sufis. Only 4 (17%) Sufis and 3 (6%) non-Sufis reported excessive alcohol use prior to conversion.

## **7- Socio-economic Status**

The socio-economic status of Sufis do not significantly differ from non-Sufis. Of the 23 Sufis, 16 (69.6%) associated themselves with the middle-class, while 7 (30.4%) identified with the working class. Of the 47 non-Sufis, 30 (63.8%) were middle class while 17 (36.2%) were working class. Educational level of both Sufis and non-Sufis does not, again, differ significantly and is, as a matter of fact, harmonious with the finding over their social class background. It is found that 60.8 percent of Sufis have gone into higher education while 55.3 percent non-Sufis have done so.

## **Conclusion**

As presented so far, the Sufi converts studied seem to differ from the non-Sufis in their conversion experiences and backgrounds. The pattern of conversion for Sufis seems to be affectional whereas it is more likely to be intellectual for non-Sufis. This may be partly explained by the fact that being Sufi requires one to be involved in the group and as a result being emotionally attracted to it rather than intellectually responding. Sufi subjects tend to come from a background in which they experienced drugs and were involved in NRMs. Reported traumatic events by Sufis also present a higher rate compared to non-Sufis.

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<sup>32</sup> The average conversion age for Sufis is 28.6

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CONCLUSION**

Conversion is necessarily a multifaceted experience, and it is obvious that not all conversions are of the same type. Individual conversions from one established religion to another are likely to differ both psychologically and socially from mass conversions actuated through missionisation, the rise of a new religion, or conversions due to crisis. The conversions studied here are usually a complex and gradual process prepared by unique conditions over a long period. They are volitional, not as a result of a sudden resolution of spiritual conflicts. They are generally conversions of adults.

Researchers have conventionally approached religious conversion as something that happens to a person who is destabilised by external forces and then brought to commit himself to a conversionist group by social-interactive pressures applied by that group. This approach may be termed "passivist" (Wilson, 1982: 118, Lofland, 1977). There is an alternative approach to the phenomenon which may be termed "activist" (Heinich, 1977, Straus, 1979, Gartrell and Shannon, 1985) and sees conversion within a contextual world hypothesis as an accomplishment on the part of the convert, rather than as the effect of social, psychological or other forces. The activist approach sees the convert as a seeker in order to construct a personally satisfying life, whether at a philosophical level of "meaningfulness" and theodicy, or at a practical level of freedom from stress or disability (see Straus, 1979: 161). So far as this study's findings are concerned, the two approaches are not antagonistic, but rather complementary. The former sheds light upon interrelationships between social/psychological conditions of conversion, and how groups act to attract new members, while the latter shows how seekers utilise their groups in pursuit of transformation. However, this thesis proposes that the conversion experience itself is a significant recentring of previous conscious or unconscious images of value and power, and the conscious adoption of a new set of beliefs and principles to reshape one's life.

Many studies (Deutsch 1975: 166, Ullman, 1989: 11) of converts to NRMs indicate that NRMs have a special appeal to disorganised, disturbed youth alienated from their family of origin. They report that an unhappy childhood and adolescence is characteristic of these converts. The present study does not strongly support other studies which found a relationship between conversion and childhood/adolescent turmoil. In general the subjects painted a normal or happy (but rarely very happy) picture of their childhood although there were extreme cases. Twenty one

(30%) of the 70 described their childhood as unhappy while only 17 (24.3%) reported an unhappy adolescence

In the psychological literature there is a convention which looks on conversion experience as being an adolescent phenomenon. The sociological literature, mostly on NRMs, finds that conversion occurs in early twenties. The average conversion age for the present sample is 29.7, with the majority (61.4%) falling into 23-45 years age-group (see table 3.4)

The finding that the conversions of the subjects interviewed usually occurred in their late twenties after they had rejected their childhood religion at adolescence may well be explained by the Eriksonian concept of a "moratorium" period during which other spiritual options are sometimes explored. Erikson (1962:43) observed that many adolescents struggling with the integration process opt to "retreat" for a period of time in order to work out a plan of self-reorganisation or integration. He posited that moratorium individuals go through a period "before they come to their crossroads, which they often do in the late twenties". During the moratorium period the majority of the converts interviewed seem to have been nominal in their religion. For some, this period provided a time for careful consideration of the pros and cons of a variety of alternatives. Twenty nine percent of the converts got involved in NRMs (see table 4.3). Only 11 percent described themselves as practising their religion of upbringing prior to conversion. Others were either nominal or atheist (13%). However, it must be stated that their drift from their religion may be part of a general social movement.

Conversion at a later age may also be explained by Kohlberg's (1984:172ff) cognitive-developmental theory of moral reasoning, which includes the "preconventional", "conventional", and "postconventional" levels (see p. 82 of this thesis). The postconventional level is reached by a minority of adults and is usually reached only after the age of 20. This level includes such mature concepts as self-chosen direction, a more universal ethical outlook, evaluation of options, and personal ethical principles that move one to ethical decisions. All these changes require cognitive conversion in areas of morality. This profile is of an individual who holds the standards on which a good society must be based (Kohlberg, 1984:178ff). In short, Kohlberg implies that conversion of a moral variety demands a certain maturity of thought and cognition which occurs only later in life and may be more appropriate for this pattern of religious conversion.

The accounts given by those interviewed suggest that the oversecularisation of society led them to seek for an alternative way of life. They initially became interested in Islam because they felt that it had strong, clear values on things they felt concerned about. Their revolt was not

directed against religious beliefs, but against certain practices (like moral permissiveness) legitimised by their former religion. Some of those (29%) who were involved or became interested in new religions were in search of an alternative to the secular and materialistic perspective of society. It is apparent that this shift is not about departure from (nominal) Christianity to Islam, but it is about a growing tendency towards the sacred or spiritual.

Most of the studies on religious conversion, especially those on NRMs seem to disregard cognitive style and put emphasis on a turbulent background. The psychodynamic approach to conversion maintains that converts experience increased emotional upheaval in the period preceding conversion as well as in childhood. A significant number of the reports of subjects in this study give accounts of troubled lives before entrance into Islam. Almost half of the sample's (48.6%) preconversion lives were judged to contain emotional distresses caused by events like a broken marriage. These distressful incidents seem to have sparked them to think about religion. For one fifth of the sample the emotional turmoil that characterised their descriptions of childhood and adolescence was also apparent in the immediate antecedents to the conversion experience. Their unhappiness in childhood and adolescence was, in most cases, caused by parental marriages which either ended up in divorce or nearly broke up, and they described this as the major trauma of their lives (see table 4.5). A single emotional "trauma" or shock may condition an individual and may bring personality change or a conversion experience (Clark, 1958: 215). This is not to say that an emotional turmoil or trauma is enough for conversion or personality change, but that the effective crisis that causes turmoil after the incident could simply cause a process which leads to conversion or personality change. However, the final decision for conversion may depend on intellectual elements. Some cases of conversions in the present sample seem to follow the above description (for example, see Charlie's case, p. 97-98). However, the material from the sample studied suggests that conversions did not occur as a direct result of the emotional turmoil or personal distress. This may be associated with conversion, but it is not necessarily a predisposing condition. In the preconvert there may be an unconscious conflict, and a "psychological set", but these factors alone may in many cases not be enough. There must be an immediate force which 'lights the fuse' at the same time. This spark is likely to be cognitive and existential questions (47 percent reported specific concerns that could be designated as cognitive or existential during the two year period prior to conversion). The course that the preconversion period often takes is that the emotional turmoil or personal distress of the individuals leads them to a stage where they develop cognitive concerns.



The converts interviewed entered into the fold of Islam by various means and for a variety of reasons. Some accepted it after studying it for a long time, and some entered it in order to be able to marry a Muslim, or after marrying a Muslim. Many converts recounted that their conversion was the result of the positive examples of Muslims. Contact with a follower of Islam may have increased the likelihood of conversion and been instrumental in the process. In general, conversions in the present sample rarely occurred without human contact. However, it must be emphasised that the converts interviewed were already oriented towards a religious quest at the time of their contact. The pattern that emerges from this study is that people decide to play roles and get involved in new beliefs and practices with a more thoroughgoing acceptance of beliefs occurring later in the process. The present finding regarding the experimental motif (60%) which stresses the activist view of conversion shows that one cannot avoid the part played by the converts. At the same time it is important to realise that conversion is a social phenomenon, with affective and emotional ties playing key roles in the affirmative decision.

The conversion process from one religion to another is made up of changes that involve large areas of personality, and these vary according to the religion itself. Conversion for the present sample required a major transformation in basic religious identity. Along both structural and subjective dimensions of the religious change, the interviewees reported an identity change.

There are social, psychological and religious preconditions out of which NRMs in the West developed. They were/are seen as filling the spiritual emptiness. Conversion to Islam through Sufism can be understood in these terms by taking into account that by joining Sufi groups in the first place, people were/are rejecting western culture rather than traditional religion. The Sufi groups observed here offered the Sufi subjects interviewed a new social identity and provided them with companionship and a sense of belonging that some of them had previously failed to attain within society. This process was further accelerated by the past events such as family disorders which many Sufis had experienced. The Sufi subjects seem to differ from non-Sufis in their conversion experiences and backgrounds. The pattern of conversion for the Sufis seems to be affectional whereas it looks likely to be intellectual for the non-Sufis (see table 6.1). This may be explained by the fact that being Sufi requires one to be involved in the group and as a result being emotionally attracted to it rather than intellectually responsive. Sufis tended to come from a background in which they experienced drugs and were involved in NRMs. Reported traumatic events by Sufis also show a higher rate when compared to non-Sufis (see section E in chapter VI).

## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A : Standard Ethics Protocol

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Ali Kose and I am a PhD student in King's College at the University of London. I am currently at work on my thesis which is a study to examine the phenomenon of "conversion of native British people to Islam". The study is based on interviews with native British men and women who were not born to a Muslim family and not brought up as a Muslim, but became Muslim and now regard themselves as Muslim.

Before I explain the method and design of my study, I would like to reassure you that your comfort, consideration and feelings towards this topic are of great concern to me. It is important that you understand that the research of my study is in no way meant to judge, challenge or change you in regard to any of your beliefs or life-styles. I simply want your opinions, insights, reasons and any other information you may wish to give with regard to your choosing Islam as your religion. I also want to know about major events and particular periods of your life as well as your conversion experience.

To ensure that your rights as a participant in this study are in no way violated or compromised, I would like to explain several safeguards to you. If you would like additional information, clarification, or you do not fully understand any of the following points I am explaining to you, please do not hesitate to ask questions.

*First*, the interview will be done anonymously, i.e. you will not be referred to by name. All your responses to the questions will be kept secretly confidential as will your identity as a participant in this study. Any information or characteristic that could in any way identify you personally as a subject will definitely not be disclosed. *Second*, this study is completely voluntary and you may decide to stop at any time you please during the interview. *Third*, you will have complete and unquestioned freedom to refuse to answer any question/s during the interview that make you uncomfortable for any reason. *Fourth*, I would be very happy to answer any questions you might have about any aspect of the study before, during or after our interview.

The design of the study itself is very simple. I would like to sit down with you on a face to face basis and talk about your life, *firstly*, before coming into contact with Islam/Muslims and how you describe it in retrospect. *Secondly*, the process and the experience of conversion. *Finally*, your life as a Muslim until now.

I have developed a number of open-ended questions that I would like you to answer. These questions range from facts about yourself and your background to reasons why you made a decision to take up Islam. I may on occasion, branch off into some impromptu questions, brought on by some interesting points. Therefore all my interviews will not be identical. I would like to emphasise that you will be given

complete freedom of response in your answers. I favour a very relaxed style of interviewing and you will certainly be given plenty of time to answer every question to your satisfaction. Should you want to return to a previous statement or question to expand on it or completely change your view after reflecting on it, that is perfectly acceptable. With your permission I will be using a tape recorder to make sure I understand all of your statements. I will be transcribing the tapes to a written interview form and I may use some of your perceptions in the final draft of my thesis. There is no set time limit to the interview. We can start and stop whenever it is most convenient for you. Likewise, we can hold the interview any place that you would feel most comfortable.

If you have any questions that you would like to ask me about the study and any comments to make on the topic, I will be happy to discuss it with you. Please feel free to think about whether you want to participate in the study.

Thank you for your help.

Ali Kose (Mr )

Department of Theology and Religious Studies

King's College London

## **Appendix B . Preliminary Questions**

Name

Former name (If changed)

Age

Birth place

Place of upbringing

Now lives in

Social class

Parents' religion

Former religion

Age of conversion

Now Muslim for

Marital status when converted

Marital status now

Religion of spouse (If married)

Education

Occupation

## **Appendix C     Interview Questions**

### **I   Lets talk about your childhood and adolescence**

#### **1- Can you describe your parents in terms of religion?**

Were they religious/moral people?

Were they religiously heterogeneous?

Would you say you had a religious upbringing?

Can you remember asking questions about religion to your parents?

#### **2- Can you describe your relationship with your parents?**

What kind of people were your parents?

Did you grow up with both parents?

How would you describe their marriage?

Who did you feel closer to, mother or father?

Did anything unusual like separation from either parents happen to you?

#### **3- How would you describe yourself when you were an adolescent?**

Did you have certain questions/doubts about your religion?

If there was dissatisfaction, what was it?

Were there emotional or cognitive matters you were concerned with?

How would you describe your relationship with your parents?

### **II   Let's now talk about your youth and the time before you converted**

#### **1- Were there temptations in your youth like drug-use, alcoholism, etc ?**

How would you describe your relationship with the society then?

Were you involved in a political or religious organisation?

#### **2- Before conversion were you still practising your religion of childhood?**

Do you remember things which were dissatisfying or confusing for you?

What did you do about these dissatisfactions or confusions?

Did you try any other religion to solve these dissatisfactions?

What image did you have then about Islam/Muslims?

#### **3- Now I would like you to tell me about the two-year period before you converted**

Could you describe yourself prior to conversion?

Have you lost interest in the religion you grew up to?

Were you looking for something?

What were you preoccupied with, emotional matters or cognitive concerns?

Did you have a sense of incompleteness, purposelessness, etc ?

Did anything unusual like a broken marriage happen?

Where were you and what were you doing then?

4- Shall we now talk about how you decided to embrace Islam?

How were you introduced to Islam?

Did something happen that helped you decide?

Did you have a religious experience that affected your decision?

Was an individual or a group helping along the way?

How long did it take you to make the decision?

What was the characteristic that most attracted you to Islam?

III Let's now talk about what happened after you decided

1- How did it feel right after your decision to convert?

What exactly did the decision change for you?

Did your decision solve or change the things that were bothering you?

In what way you felt you were transformed?

Did you feel your life had taken on new purposes?

Have you experienced doubts as to the reality or validity of your conversion?

2- How did the people around you, your parents, friends, etc take your decision?

Has your attachment to them diminished?

IV We finally arrive at the present Let's talk about the way you are now

1- How do you see yourself, former X and present Y?

Can you define conversion for yourself?

Do you feel like a different person now?

Do you see things differently now than you did before?

Do you think other people have noticed that you have changed?

How do you see your former life, in the wrong direction, sinful, lost etc ?

Would you wish you had been born into a Muslim family/environment?

2- To what extent did you change in terms of religious beliefs and practices

Do you feel that you totally rejected your former religion by accepting Islam?

How far do you practise your new religion?

Do you perform five daily prayers, do you fast, do you drink, etc ?

Has circumcision been performed on you since conversion? (Males)

Did conversion also bring cultural transition for you?

Did you change the way you dress?

Does your future spouse have to be a Muslim? (If not married)

Do you like talking to other people about your new choice?

Are you involved in any religious activities now?

How do you relate to the greater society and Muslim community now?

\_\_\_\_\_ 0 \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D . Conversion certificate issued to converts by the Islamic Cultural Centre in London on application**

CONVERSION CERTIFICATE  
ISLAMIC CULTURAL CENTRE  
146 Park Road,London NW8 7RG

This is to certify that at the London Central Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre,  
146 Park Road, London NW8 7RG on the \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_ 19\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

adopted Islam as his/her religion and does solemnly hereby declared that upon the deepest consideration and in the fullest liberty of choice s/he adopts for himself/herself the religion of Islam and that henceforth s/he will be guided by the two main principles thereof

that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is His servant and Prophet

Declared this day in the presence of the London Central Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre

Convert's signature

Witness (1)

Witness (2)

Imam

Surname

First name(s)

Father's name

Permanent address

Previous religion of applicant

Parent's religion

Nationality and country of origin

Identity no



**Appendix E ·  $\chi^2$  examining possible differences in characteristics of subjects from different recruitment sources ·**

1- From addresses provided by Islamic organisations (n=12)

2- Recruited in mosques and meetings (n=45)

3- Snow-ball recruitment (n=13)

	$\chi^2$ with continuity correction	df
1- Age of conversion	0.96 $70 < p \leq 80$	2
2- Sufi non-Sufi	3.85 $50 < p \leq 70$	2
3- Gender	0.004398 $p > .95$	2
4- Education	1.09 $70 < p \leq 80$	2
5- Class	2.561 $10 < p \leq 20$	2
6- Religion of upbringing	1.31 $70 < p \leq 80$	2
7- Upbringing with regard to religion	0.21 $80 < p \leq 90$	2
8- Belief in God before conversion	0.3 $80 < p \leq 90$	2
9- Cognitive concerns before conversion	2.429 $10 < p \leq 20$	2
10- Emotional concerns before conversion	2.826 $05 < p \leq 10$	2
11- Married to a Muslim at the time of conversion	2.67 $50 < p \leq 70$	2
12- Intellectual conversion motif	6.69 $30 < p \leq 50$	2
13- Affectional conversion motif	1.19 $70 < p \leq 80$	2
14- Experimental conversion motif	1.32 $70 < p \leq 80$	2
15- Mystical conversion motif	0.3 $80 < p \leq 90$	2

**Appendix F: Recruitment or sampling methods in other studies to which comparisons were made throughout the thesis**

author(s)	religion(s)	number of subjects	how recruited or sampled	method of data collection
Allison (1969)	Methodists	20	divinity school students	interview
Austin (1977)	Born-again Christians	9	volunteers from group meetings	interview
Baer (1978)	Levites and Aaronites (a Mormon group)	35	volunteers from group meetings	interview
Balch & Taylor (1977)	UFO cult	31	participant observation	interview
Barker (1984)	Unification Church	30	participant observation	interview and questionnaire
Beckford (1978)	Jehovah's Witnesses	55	random sampling	interview
Bragan (1977)	Christians	1	case study	interview
Cavenar & Spaulding (1977)	Christians	4	case study (clinical study)	interview
Christensen (1963)	Christians	22	case study	interview
Deutsch (1975)	Hinduism	14	volunteers approached at group meeting	interview
Ebaugh & Vaughn (1984)	Catholic Charismatics Christian Scientists Baha'is	150	snowball-quota sampling	interview
Galanter, et al (1979)	Unification Church	237	contacted through churches	questionnaire
Gartrell & Shannon (1985)	Divine Light Mission	26	field study	interview
Geriach & Hine (1968)	Pentecostals	239	participant observation	interview and questionnaire
Gillespie (1991)	Christian		review of literature	
Greil & Rudy (1984)	Hare Krishna Nichiren Shoshu Divine Light Mission Christ Communal Org Crusade House Mormons Levites Unification Church The Church of the Sun UFO Cult		review of 10 case studies	
Heinrich (1977)	Catholic Pentecostals	277	snowball sampling	interview

Jacobs (1987)	17 different authoritarian religious movements  Charismatic Christians Hindu based groups Buddhists Unification Church Baha'i	40	contacted through newspaper advertisement	interview and questionnaire
Kildahl (1977)	Christians	40	theological seminary students	tests
Levin & Zegans (1974)	Orthodox Jews	1	case study	interview
Lynch (1977)	Church of the Sun	22	participant observation	interview
Lofland & Stark (1965)	Divine Precepts	21	participant observation	interview
Nordquist (1978)	Ananda	28	participant observation	questionnaire and tests
Poston (1988)	Islam	70	contacted through Muslim organisations	questionnaire and written testimonies in Islamic books, periodicals, etc
Rochford (1982)	Hare Krishna Six ISKCON communities	214	participant observation	non-random survey and interview
Salzman (1953)	Catholics	4	case study (patients under psychotherapy)	interview
Scobie (1973)	Christian	170	theological college students	Questionnaire and interview
Snow & Phillips (1980)	Nichiren Shoshu	15	participant observation	interview
Starbuck (1911)	Protestants	192	contacted through churches	questionnaire
Staples & Vaughn (1984)	Evangelicals	15	snowball sampling	interview
Ullman (1989)	Roman Catholic Orthodox Jews Hare Krishnas Baha'is	40	volunteers from group meeting	interview

## GLOSSARY

- AHL al-KITĀB "People of the Book" Those whom the Qur'ān cites as having received revealed scriptures  
i.e., Jews and Christians
- AHMADĪ A member of the heterodox sect founded by Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad (1835-1908)
- BARAKAH It is grace in the sense of a blessing or spiritual influence which God sends down *Barakah* may be found in persons, places and things Certain actions and circumstances may also be a vehicle for blessing, as other actions and circumstances can dispel grace
- DAJJĀL The "false Messiah", or "Antichrist", who will appear shortly before Jesus returns to earth at the end of time
- DARQĀWIYYAH A branch of *Shādhikīyyah Tariqah*
- DA'WAH Literally call, invitation, summoning In the religious sense it is mission to exhort people to embrace Islam as the true religion
- DHIKR Remembrance of God, making mention of God It refers to invocation of the Divine Name For the Sufis, *dhikr* is a spiritual method of concentration, the invocation of a Divine Name under the direction of a spiritual master belonging to an authentic chain of transmission
- DĪN al-FITRAH Religion *naturalis*
- AMĪR Literally commander In the past *amīr* was usually a military title, now used to mean a prince or as a title for various rulers or chiefs
- FITRAH Literally "primordial nature" The primordial norm, a harmony between creation, and God
- HIDĀYAH Divine guidance
- HIJRAH The migration Specifically the emigration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina
- IMĀM Leader in public prayer, one whose leadership or example is to be followed The legal title given to the leader of the Muslims
- IRTIDĀD Apostasy
- JAMĀ'AT Group (of people), band, party, community
- JIHĀD Literally struggle, exertion Religious war, fight, battle According to Islamic law, the religiously obligatory effort to establish the sway of Islam over the world, or to defend the land of Islam
- KA BAH The large cubic stone structure, covered with a black cloth, which stands in the centre of the Grand Mosque of Mecca It represents a sanctuary consecrated to God since time immemorial, and it is towards the *Ka bah* that Muslims orient themselves in prayer
- MAHDĪ Literally "the guided one" A figure Muslims believe will appear at the end of time to restore righteousness briefly - over the span of a few years - before the end of the world, the Day of Judgement
- MUQADDAM Literally "one who is promoted" While it can mean any kind of representative, it means, in particular, the representative of a *shaykh*, who is authorised to give instruction and initiate disciples in certain Sufi orders
- MURĀBITŪN Men who, in religious organisations, defended the frontiers of Islamic world, often in remote outposts
- MURĀQABAH Literally "vigilance", "recollectedness" An aspect of meditation, a waiting upon a spiritual presence, a permanent state of awareness
- MŪRĪD Literally one "who is desirous [of spiritual realisation]" A disciple in a Sufi order

**NAQSHBANDIYYAH** A prominent Sufi order founded by Muhammad Bahā'ad-Dīn Naqshband (1317-1389)  
**RAJ** Kingdom, commonly used for British rule in India  
**RAMADĀN** The ninth month of Islamic calendar which is month of fasting Muslims refrain from eating, drinking and sexual relationship during the hours of daylight  
**RIBĀT** The performance of garrison duty at the frontiers of the Muslim land  
**SHAHĀDAH** Islamic profession of faith which enjoins the believer to announce that there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger  
**SHARĪ AH** The path to be followed, the totality of the exoteric revelation of Islam, the divine law  
**SHAYKH** A venerable old man or man of authority A spiritual master, the head of a Sufi order  
**SHĀDHILIYYAH** One of the most important Sufi brotherhoods founded by Imām ash-Shādhilī (1196-1258) which includes the *Darqāwīyya*, the *Alawīyyah*, and many others  
**SHĪ'ITE** Muslims who regard the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, 'Alī, and his descendants as the only legitimate leaders of the Muslim community after the Prophet Muhammad's death  
**SILSILAH** Literally "interlink", a "chain", "series" In Sufism, the initiatic chain of transmission of a Divine *barakah* is called a *silsilah*, *barakah* being a grace or a Divine influence which comes from God alone  
**SUFI** A Muslim mystic, so called after the early ascetics in Islam who wore garments of coarse wool (sūf)  
**SUNNAH** Literally habit, path or way, a manner of life Technically the spoken and acted example of the Prophet  
**SUNNĪ** One who follows the trodden path, the model practice of the Prophet and of the early Muslim community  
**TABLIGH** The action of calling non-Muslims to the religion of Islam or those Muslims to practice it regularly  
**TARĪQAH** Literally "path" A generic term referring to the doctrines and methods of mystic union, and rightly synonymous, therefore with the terms of esotericism and mysticism, it refers also to a "school" or "brotherhood" of mystics, of which there are very many, all ultimately linked to a single source  
**UMMAH** A people, a community, a nation, in particular the "nation" of Islam which transcends ethnic or political definition  
**ZAKĀH** The giving up of a portion of the wealth one may possess, in excess of what is needed for sustenance, to purify or legitimise what one retains It may be paid directly to the poor as alms, or to the state

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